

English Literature for Secondary Schools  
*General Editor* :—J. H. FOWLER, M.A.

## NJAL AND GUNNAR



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TORONTO

# Njal and Gunnar

## *A Tale of Old Iceland*

Retold for Boys from Sir G. W. Dasent's  
"Story of Burnt Njal"

By

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## INTRODUCTION

### ICELAND AND ITS PEOPLE

FAR away in the North Atlantic, just outside the Arctic Circle, lies Iceland. A strange land ! It has been raised from the sea by the action of volcanoes. Almost all its mountains have been volcanoes, and some are so still. At times one of them will send out great streams of lava and lay waste some fertile district. There are many hot springs, some of which shoot into the air like fountains. Except near the sea-coast the land is barren, being covered with rough rocks and sand. Every hill which rises three thousand feet above the sea is always covered with ice and snow. One mountain mass called Vatna, in the south-east of the island, covers more than three thousand square miles, and always wears a sheet of ice. Through the long winter the whole country is white with snow. Even the sea on the north of the island is covered with ice in the winter, and often all through the summer too ; but the Gulf Stream keeps the south coast free from it. In the south of the island the sun at mid-winter does not rise till ten o'clock, and it sets at two. In the north it just shows a part of its face above the horizon at noon, and then disappears. But to make up for this, the night (or rather the twilight) at mid-summer lasts only four hours in the south, and in the north there is no night at all. No corn grows there, though at the time of our story a few poor crops were raised. The trees are few, and are seldom more than twelve feet high. There are no fruit-trees, but only some wild shrubs which

bear berries. There are no wild animals except the fox. To this day there are no roads. What is there then ? Why does anyone live in such a dreary place ?

Well, there is grass, sufficient to support many cattle ; there are beautiful flowers which make the hills bright for a short season ; there are many fish in the rivers ; there are seals which can be killed for their skins and their " blubber " or fat ; and there are whales from which train-oil is got. These things seemed enough to attract a large number of people in old days. The Norwegians discovered the island about the year 850 A.D. A few settlers from Ireland were already there, and, in the next two hundred and fifty years, many more came from Norway and the Hebrides ; so that at the end of that time there were fifty thousand inhabitants spread all round the coast.

They lived by their cattle and by fishing. Their out-door work lasted only five months of the year, and hay-making was a very important part of it. Frost and snow drove them indoors in the winter, and then they spent their time in weaving, making tools and weapons, and the like. To get bread and other things which their island would not produce, they sent wool and oil and cloth to Norway. Milk and butter and cheese, as well as meat and clothing, were provided by their flocks and herds. Fish caught in the summer and salted helped them to live through the winter ; but they must get salt and even the timber for their houses from abroad.

They were pagans, and worshipped Thor and Odin—Thor the Thunderer whose name is still preserved in our " Thursday," and Odin (or Wodin), father of gods and men, whose day we still call " Wednesday." Courage they thought to be the greatest of virtues. Those who died bravely in battle were taken to Valhalla, where they feasted with the gods and fought with each other, and would do so till the day should come when the world and the gods themselves should be destroyed, and a better heaven and earth should arise in place of the old ones.

They were a fierce and warlike set of men ; for the most part truthful and honourable, but very slow at forgiving an injury. An insult was thought a good enough reason for killing a man ; and if the man insulted did not take revenge, his wife would often taunt and urge him on till he went out to take his foe's life. If a man was killed, it was the duty of his next-of-kin to avenge his death ; but this was not always done by murder. He might bring a lawsuit against the murderer and get him either fined or banished ; or he might take an " atonement," that is, a sum of money settled by judges chosen by the two parties. If a man did not go abroad when banished, or if he otherwise broke the law, he might be declared an outlaw, and then any one might kill him.

Each district had its " Thing " or council for settling disputes : and every midsummer they held the " Al-thing " —a sort of parliament for the whole island. Men rode to this from all quarters, each putting up a booth or rough house for himself and his followers. First changes of the law were proposed and discussed at the " Hill of Laws," and men gave notice of any lawsuits which they had in hand. Then these suits were heard in the four quarter-courts, each with its thirty-six judges. Each court heard cases against men from one of the four quarters of the island. One might think that since they had laws and courts they could easily have had more justice and fewer murders : but the courts were not very useful, for if a man did not know the exact form in which a suit should be conducted, he was in danger, not only of losing his case, but of being punished for " contempt of court " and made an outlaw. Again, the laws were not just from our point of view. For instance, if a man was treacherously attacked by his enemies and killed one of them in defending himself, he might be punished for manslaughter. When there was an important lawsuit both parties would ride to the Thing with all their friends, for they were never sure that if the case seemed likely to go in their favour their enemies would not attack them.

Many tales were told of these old Icelanders, and men good at story-telling used to repeat them at their winter feasts. After a time they were written down, and so preserved. How much of them is true and how much false we cannot say; but it seems that the men and women about whom they are told really lived, and that the deeds which they are said to have done are not all invented. The story of Njal, as we have it, was written quite two hundred years after his death: but it is based on older stories, and those who first told them very likely knew Njal and his friends.

A little west of the most southerly point of the island several rivers run into the sea, and there is good soil in the level country near their mouths. Not far from the sea, near a river called the Markfleet, stood the farm-house named Bergthorsknoll, and here, about a century before William the Conqueror invaded England, lived Njal. He was a rich man, and much honoured by all his neighbours, not only for his wealth, but for his kind heart and his wisdom. He was the best lawyer in the island, and was always ready to help others in their lawsuits. He was not only wise, but fore-sighted—that is, he could see visions and foretell the future. He was a very handsome man; but unfortunately he had no beard, for which, as we shall see, he was sometimes mocked by his enemies.

His wife was named Bergthora, and he had called his house after her. She was a good brave-hearted woman, but rather sharp-tempered. They had three sons and three daughters. The eldest of the sons was named Skarphedinn. He was a fierce fighter—tall, strong, and fearless. He was the swiftest runner in the island. He spoke quickly and without hesitation, and was clever at making verses—generally mocking ones. His bitter words sometimes got him into trouble, but he usually kept his tongue under control. He was a strange-looking fellow with dark brown curly hair and good eyes, but with a face pale as ashes, a turned-up nose, an ugly mouth, and teeth which stuck out. He was an honourable man, a

good friend and a bad enemy. His brothers were named Grim and Helgi. They were strong handsome men, and they almost worshipped Skarphedinn.

A little further inland, at a farm called Lithend, lived Gunnar. Like Njal he was rich, and like Skarphedinn, he was skilled in the use of arms. He was tall and strong, and could use his left hand as well as his right; and when he raised his sword he struck so swiftly that it seemed as if there were three blades in the air at once. He was an archer who never missed his mark; and even when wearing his armour he could jump his own height. He was handsome and polite, and the best of friends; but he did not give his friendship easily. He had two brothers, Kolskegg and Hjort, both tall, strong men who, especially Kolskegg, loved Gunnar dearly. Their mother lived with the three brothers, but their father was dead at the time of our story. There was the very closest friendship between the families at Bergthorsknoll and Lithend, and especially between Njal and Gunnar.





## PART I. GUNNAR.

### CHAPTER I.

#### GUNNAR'S MARRIAGE.

IT was late one autumn when a certain Norwegian trader found himself at Lithend. He did not dare to trust his little ship to the rough winter seas and return to Norway, so gladly accepted Gunnar's invitation to stay with him till spring. They took such a liking to each other that the merchant asked Gunnar to go abroad with him. He was pleased with the idea for two reasons. First, if he went "sea-roving" as they called it (or, in plain language, if he became a pirate) he would win great fame. Secondly, he might get great wealth; but he cared less for money than for fame, since he was already rich enough. After thinking over the matter for some months he consulted Njal, who advised him to go. So, when spring came, he handed over all his goods to Njal to take care of, and sailed for Europe, taking Kolskegg with him. He asked the captain if he had any "long-ships," that is, battle-ships. The captain had two, and a cousin of his two more. They found crews for these, and the first battle they fought was with some other sea-rovers who tried to stop them. They defeated them 20

and won much spoil. Then they sailed south and were successful wherever they went. In another fight with pirates Gunnar won a magic bill (or long battle-axe) which always gave out a strange sound before a battle, and in the same fight Kolskegg won a good sword which he always carried afterwards. Now, having been eighteen months away from home and made a name for themselves, the two brothers visited Earl Hacon, the ruler of Norway, and stayed with him all through the winter.

10 Hacon was much pleased with them and gave them gifts, and, when spring came, loaded their ship with flour and timber and sent them home to Iceland.

Njal was very glad to see Gunnar again, but gave him a warning.

"You have won great fame," he said, "but that will cause much envy."

"I should like to be on good terms with all men," said Gunnar.

"You will have much trouble, and will always be  
20 engaged in quarrels," said Njal.

"So be it," answered Gunnar, "if my cause is good."

"It will be good if you have not to smart for others," said Njal.

He then asked Gunnar if he was going to the Thing, and Gunnar said "Yes," and begged Njal to go with him.

"No, I will not go," said Njal; "and, if I had my way, you should not either."

It would have been well for Gunnar if he had taken Njal's advice; but he had made up his mind. He  
30 thanked Njal heartily for the care he had taken of his goods, made him handsome presents, and rode home. Then he and Kolskegg went together to the Thing.

Very pleasant did they find it. Everyone wanted to see the two heroes. Everyone wanted to hear about their fights. From every booth men came to wonder at them and their fine clothes, and each day they were asked to feast with others or bade their friends to feast with them. And Gunnar was as much praised for his hospitality and kindly manners as for his courage. He was glad to have done with fighting. That was not real happiness. He would now settle down amongst his friends and attend to his crops and his cattle. That was 10 better than roving over the salt sea. Perhaps he would take a wife.

Such thoughts were passing through his mind one day as he was returning from a friend's booth to his own, when a tall handsome woman stopped to speak to him. He thought he had never seen such a beautiful being. She was wearing a scarlet cloak trimmed with needle-work, and her golden hair was so long that she could tuck it into the girdle which she wore round her waist. Gunnar asked her who she was, and she told him that 20 she was Hallgerda, Hrut's niece. She asked him about his voyage, and they sat down and had a long talk ; and a fine couple they looked with their handsome faces and bright clothes. At last Gunnar asked her if she were unmarried.

"Yes," she said, "there are not many who would run the risk of marrying me."

"Why," he asked, "are none good enough for you ?"

"Not that," she replied, "but I am said to be hard to please in husbands."

30

"How would you answer if I were to ask for you ?" he inquired.

"You cannot mean that."

"I do though."

"If you have any mind, go and see my father."

Now before going on with the story, it will be well to say what sort of a woman Hallgerda was. When she was a child playing with other children, her father once called on his brother Hrut to admire her beauty. "She is fair enough," said Hrut, "and many will smart for it. But how came thief's eyes into our family?" When  
10 she grew up her father gave her in marriage without her own consent. She was angry at this. She had been educated in the house of a bad, quarrelsome man named Thiostolf, and she arranged that he should live with her and her husband. She was extravagant, and wasted her husband's goods; and when he blamed her she accused him and his father of being misers. He lost his temper and struck her on the face. Soon after her foster-father came in, and learning what had happened, he went out and murdered her husband. She was  
20 married again, and Thiostolf killed her second husband, for which he was himself slain by Hrut. We can now understand what she meant when she said she was thought hard to please in husbands.

Gunnar went to Hrut and his brother. Hrut told him all about Hallgerda's bad temper, but nothing would make him change his mind. Hallgerda was sent for, and they were betrothed. Gunnar rode home and told Njal of the matter, and Njal was very sorry.

"Why do you think this so unwise?" asked Gunnar.  
30 "Because all kinds of ill will come of it if she comes here."

"Never shall she spoil our friendship," said Gunnar.

“ Ah, but that may come very near ! ” sighed Njal, “ and besides, you will always be having to make atonement for her.”

However, it was useless to talk. The matter was settled : and before winter came they were married. At the wedding feast Thrain, a kinsman of Gunnar, fell in love with Hallgerda's daughter by her second marriage, a beautiful girl of fourteen. He lost no time in courting, for they were married that same day !

## CHAPTER II.

## HALLGERDA QUARRELS WITH BERGTHORA.

NJAL had said that trouble would come of Gunnar's marriage, and it was not long before his words proved true. It was their custom to feast together every winter, and they took it in turn to go to each other's house. The winter after his marriage it was Gunnar's turn to go to Bergthorsknoll. When he and Hallgerda arrived, the wife of Helgi (Njal's son) not being at home, Hallgerda seated herself in her place. Presently Bergthora came in and asked Hallgerda to move.

10 "I will not be driven into a corner for anyone," said she.

"I shall rule here," said Bergthora; and Hallgerda, very unwillingly, moved to another seat.

Presently Bergthora carried round water to the guests that they might wash their hands, and Hallgerda took her hand and said,

"There is not much to choose between you and Njal. He has no beard, and you have hang-nails on every finger."

20 "That's true," said Bergthora, "but we don't find fault with each other. You plotted your husband's death though he had a beard."

"It is not much use my being married to the bravest

man in Iceland if you don't avenge this, Gunnar," she exclaimed.

Gunnar sprang up crying "I will go home. Quarrel at home if you must, but not in other men's houses. I owe much to Njal, and will never be egged on to harm him by you."

So they left the house, Hallgerda warning Bergthora that she had not heard the last of the matter.

When midsummer came Njal and Gunnar rode to the Thing, and Gunnar's last words to his wife were 10 advice not to show any ill-temper to his friends while he was away. She replied angrily, but he would not quarrel with her.

Now Njal and Gunnar owned a little wood at Redslip, and each used to take from it all the firewood he wanted without saying a word to the other. When Njal had gone to the Thing, Bergthora sent a man named Swart to cut wood, and others to carry it home. Hallgerda heard of this and said,

"So Bergthora means to rob me. I'll take care that 20 Swart does not hew wood again."

Her mother-in-law heard her and reproved her, but she cared little for reproof. She sent for one of her servants named Kol, a very bad man, and told him,

"Go to Redslip. There you will find Swart."

"What shall I do to him?" he asked.

"What should I choose a man like you for if I didn't want him killed?" said she.

"I can do that, but it will probably cost me my own life," was his reply.

30

"What a fuss you make about it!" she said. "You are behaving very badly after all I have done for

you. I must get another man to do this if you are afraid."

He was very angry at this speech, and, to prove that he was no coward, took his axe, and hurried off to Redslip. There he waited till Swart was alone, and then murdered him.

Hallgerda sent a man to tell Gunnar what she had done. He said nothing. He would not blame his wife in public, but he was deeply grieved. Those who stood  
10 by did not know whether he was pleased or angry. Presently he decided what to do. He took his men to Njal's booth, and told him the whole story. Njal listened quietly and then said,

"You must take care not to let her have her way in everything."

"You shall settle the terms of the atonement," said Gunnar.

"It will be hard work to atone for all Hallgerda's mischief," said Njal. "We must remember our old  
20 promises of friendship; and something tells me that though you will have much trouble on her account, you will come out of it well. As for the atonement, you shall pay twelve ounces of silver: but if I have in future to make an atonement to you, you shall grant me as easy terms as I now do to you."

Gunnar paid the money, and Njal took it home. Bergthora said that he had been just, but that the matter should not end there. Hallgerda blamed Gunnar, but he said he was master in his own house. She  
30 kept chattering about the matter as if she had done something to be proud of, and this came to Bergthora's ears and made her still more angry. The murdered



man had been a great favourite of hers, and she could not forgive his death.

So matters went on till the next Thing. Then, as soon as Njal had left home, Bergthora sent a reckless fellow named Atli to kill Kol. He killed him in fair fight, and again Hallgerda sent a message to Gunnar, thinking that now his friendship with Njal must end. But Njal expressed his sorrow for his wife's deed, and asked Gunnar to name the price of the atonement. "Twelve ounces of silver," said Gunnar: and Njal 10 handed back the very coins which he had received from him the year before.

Hallgerda was determined to have her revenge, so sent for her kinsman Brynjolf, and plotted with him how Atli should be slain. Atli knew that his life was in danger, but when Njal advised him to go to the east end of the island and settle there, he said, "I would rather die in your service than live in another man's. But this I ask: if I fall, do not accept the price of a thrall for my life." 20

"You shall be atoned for as a free man," said Njal.

At the time of the Thing Bergthora sent him away quietly to make charcoal at Skarphedinn's farm. But Hallgerda heard of this and sent Brynjolf after him. Brynjolf stole up behind him and wounded him before he knew he was there. Atli turned and threw a spear at him, but he fell down and let it pass over him, and then watched Atli bleed to death.

Hallgerda sent a man to tell Gunnar the story. "Hallgerda's kinsmen will cost you much," said Kolskegg, 30 who was standing by. They went and told Njal, and again asked him to be judge in his own cause.

"We two have always meant never to quarrel," said Njal, "but I cannot call him a thrall."

"That is right," said Gunnar.

"Hallgerda does not let our servants die of old age," said Skarphedinn.

"Your mother will take care that blow is returned for blow," said Gunnar.

"Yes, there will be enough of that work," said Njal sadly. Then he fixed the fine at a hundred ounces of  
10 silver. Some bystanders said this was too much, but Gunnar got angry with them and said that two hundred was often paid for men no better than Atli.

Njal's words were too true. Bergthora stirred up Thord, the foster-father of her three sons, to kill Brynjolf. He was very strong and brave, but peaceable, and had never slain a man before. He met Brynjolf and told him to be on his guard: they fought, and Thord was victorious. Hallgerda egged on two guests of Gunnar's named Sigmund and Skiolld to kill Thord.  
20 Thord asked them to fight him fairly, one at a time, but they would not. He defended himself bravely, but fell at last. Gunnar and Kolskegg heard of it and went to meet Njal.

"Hard tidings have I to tell thee," said Gunnar. "Thord is slain, and I come to offer atonement."

Njal thought awhile. Then he said, "I will take it, but I shall be blamed by my wife and sons; for Thord was very dear to all of us. Yet I will run the risk."

"Had not your sons better be here when you make  
30 your award?" asked Gunnar.

"No," said Njal, "for they will not readily agree to a peace. But they will keep it if I make it."

"So be it," said Gunnar. "Make your award."

"I fix it at two hundred pieces of silver," said Njal, "and you will think that much."

"It is not too much," said Gunnar, and he went away to fetch the money.

Skarphedinn came in and Njal told him what had happened.

"Who slew Thord ? " he asked.

"Sigmund and Skiold."

"They thought they needed much strength ! How soon shall the day come when we lift our hands ? "

"That will not be far off," said Njal. "But do not break the peace which I have made."

"Then we will not break it," said Skarphedinn. "But if they do us any fresh wrong, we will bear this murder in mind."

"If that happens I will not ask you to spare them," said Njal.

Gunnar rode home from the Thing, and when he saw Sigmund he scolded him for a long time. "You make a bad use of your powers," said he. "I have made your peace with Njal ; but see that you get into no more quarrels. You are mischievous, and carry ill-luck with you. You go about with scorn and mocking. That is why you get on so well with Hallgerda, for you two have the same sort of temper."

Sigmund promised to behave better in future, but he did not keep his promise very long. It happened one day that some beggar women came to Lithend. Hallgerda asked them to her bower, or private room, where 30 she was sitting with her daughter, her son-in-law Thrain, Sigmund, and a crowd of women.

"Have you any news?" she asked when they had sat down.

"None," they replied.

"Where were you last night?"

"At Bergthorsknoll."

"What was Njal doing?"

"He was busy sitting still."

"And his sons? *They* think themselves men."

"They are tall fellows, but untried as yet. Skarphedinn was whetting an axe, Grim fitting a spear-head to a shaft, and Helgi riveting the hilt of a sword."

"They must be bent on some great deed," sneered Hallgerda.

"We know nothing of that," said a beggar woman.

"What were the servants doing?" was Hallgerda's next question.

"One of them was carting manure up the hill-side."

"What for?"

20 "To make the grass grow better."

"Njal has lost his wits though he is so fond of giving advice to others," said Hallgerda.

"How so?"

"I can prove it to you. Why doesn't he let them cart manure over his chin so that he may be like other men? Let us call him the Beardless Carle, and his sons the Dung-beardlings. Come, Sigmund, make us a song about them."

30 "Gladly," said he: and then he sang a mocking song giving these names to Njal and his sons. The idle people sitting around were delighted, and roared with laughter. But when Gunnar, who had been just outside

and heard what was said, came into the room, there was a sudden silence.

"You are a foolish man," he said to Sigmund. "You revile Njal's sons and Njal who is even more worthy than they, and forget all the advice I have given you. This will be your death. If any man repeats the words that have been spoken to-day he shall not stay in my house, and I will never forgive him."

Not a word was said in reply, and from that day none of Gunnar's household dared to use the nicknames. But 10 the beggar women said, "We shall get a reward if we tell Bergthora this." So they returned to Bergthorsknoll and told the tale. Bergthora repeated it to her sons.

"Ours is no woman's nature," said Skarphedinn, "that we should fly into a rage at every little thing."

"Yet Gunnar was angry for your sakes," said Bergthora, "and he is thought to be good tempered. If you bear this insult you will bear anything."

They said nothing, but a red flush came into Skarphedinn's pale cheeks. Grim bit his lip, and Helgi left 20 the room. Bergthora left the room too, but presently she came back still fretting over the insult.

"Slow and sure, mistress," said Njal, who knew his sons' tempers better than their mother. He did not egg them on, and there was no need to do so.

That night as Njal lay in bed an axe struck against the door which separated his bed from the hall. He opened the door, and saw that all the shields had gone. "Who has taken the shields?" he asked.

"Your sons went out with them," said Bergthora. 30

Njal put on his shoes and ran quickly out of the house. He could see his sons going up the steep hill behind it.

"Where are you going, Skarphedinn?" he cried.

"To look after your sheep," he answered.

"You would not then be armed," he said.

Then Skarphedinn sang a song saying that Sigmund must be more stupid than a sheep, or he would not have sought death by making a song in scorn of him: and so the brothers went on their way up the hill.

Next morning Sigmund and Skiold went out early to look after Gunnar's horses, which were grazing on a hill  
10 side. Skarphedinn caught sight of a red coat in the distance, and said to his brothers, "See, there is Sigmund. I will attack him, for he is the stronger of the two. Helgi and Grim, you can deal with Skiold."

When they drew near, Skarphedinn called out to his enemies to guard themselves. He carried a shield, and an axe which he called the Ogress of War. Sigmund had both shield and helmet, and wore a mail shirt. He carried a sword at his side, and a spear in his hand. He thrust at Skarphedinn with the spear, but Skar-  
20 phedinn caught the blow on his shield and cut through the spear-haft with his axe. Then he aimed a blow at Sigmund and cut his shield nearly in two. Sigmund drew his sword and thrust at Skarphedinn. It stuck fast in the latter's shield, and he gave it a twist so that he jerked the sword from Sigmund's grasp. Skarphedinn now struck him on the shoulder with his axe and wounded him, despite his shirt of mail. He dragged the axe towards him, and Sigmund fell on his knees.

30 "You have bowed low to me," mocked Skarphedinn, "but you shall lie on your mother's bosom ere we part," and with that he cut off his head.

Meantime Skiold was attacked by the other two, and had no chance. Grim cut off his foot with his sword, and Helgi thrust a spear through him. They found a shepherd of Hallgerda's, and bade him take Sigmund's head to his mistress and ask whether it had sung mocking songs of them. This he dared not do, but he went home and told the tale.

"It is what might have been looked for. It was the result of Sigmund's folly," said Gunnar. He would not let a suit for manslaughter be set on foot. He asked 10 for no atonement. He did nothing. Hallgerda often reminded him of the matter, but he paid no heed to her.

Three years passed away, and at every Thing men expected him to bring a suit against Njal's sons, but they were disappointed. Then he had a difficulty in a lawsuit and rode to consult Njal, who gave him a hearty welcome. Gunnar said, "I am come to ask your advice about a difficult point of law."

"You are worthy of it," said Njal, and told him all he wanted to know. Then he took Gunnar's hand 20 and said, "Too long has your kinsman Sigmund been unatoned."

"He has been atoned long ago," said Gunnar (meaning that he had only got what he deserved), "but I will not refuse the honour you offer me."

He had never said a word against Njal's sons, but now Njal insisted that he should make his own award: so he demanded two hundred ounces of silver, which Njal paid at once. Gunnar published this at the next Thing, and Njal and his sons were much praised. He also said 30 that if anyone repeated Sigmund's mocking words he should die without atonement. Gunnar and Njal again

promised that they would themselves settle any differences which might arise between them.

Thus ended the quarrel. It had made the first nine years of Gunnar's married life unhappy. Because Hallgerda did not like the seat given her at a feast six men had died. But she was not ashamed or sorry. Rather she was proud of what she had done. The next mischief which she caused was of such a disgraceful nature that not even she could be proud of it. This, however, was  
10 some years later, and for a while poor Gunnar led a quiet and peaceful life, respected by all his neighbours.



## CHAPTER III.

## HALLGERDA'S THEFT.

THERE came a time of scarcity in Iceland. There was a dry summer and the grass was so poor that many of the cattle died, and the rest got very thin. When winter came, many men found themselves without either meat or hay to feed their cows. Gunnar shared his stores with his neighbours until he found himself in want. Then he called Kolskegg and his cousin Thrain, and rode with them to Kirkby, to the house of a man named Otkell, to see if he could buy what he wanted. They found him at home and a friend of his named Skamkell with him. 10

"I have come to buy hay and meat from you, if you have any left," said Gunnar.

Otkell turned to Skamkell, who was a spiteful man and a great liar, and consulted him as to what he should say. Then he replied, "I have plenty of both, but I will not sell them to you."

"Will you give them to me then, and trust to my paying you back somehow?" asked Gunnar—for he could not think that Otkell, who had no quarrel with him, would be so ill-natured as to refuse. 20

"I will not do that either," said Otkell.

"It would serve him right if we took what we want and paid him the price of it," said Thrain.

"I will have no hand in a robbery," said Gunnar.

"Will you buy a thrall of me?" asked Otkell—for he had a worthless servant whom he wanted to get rid of. A price was fixed, and Gunnar agreed to take the man, for he was in want of one just then: but he had to go home without the stores which he needed so badly.

When Njal heard of this he blamed Otkell, but Bergethora said, "What's the use of talking about a little thing like this? Why don't you give Gunnar what he wants?"

"That I will do," said Njal: and he loaded fifteen horses with hay and five with meat and took them to Lithend.

"Here are hay and meat," he said to Gunnar. "In future, if you want anything, come to me instead of going to strangers."

"Your gifts are good," said Gunnar: "but the friendship of you and your sons is better."

20 Winter passed away and midsummer came. Gunnar rode to the Thing as usual, leaving Hallgerda at home. There was plenty of meat in the house, but the cattle had not got over last year's scarcity, and so there was no butter or cheese. Hallgerda called the new thrall to her and said, "I have an errand to send you on. You are to go to Kirkby."

"What for?" he asked.

30 "You shall there steal enough butter and cheese to load two horses. Then you shall set fire to the storehouse. Everyone will think that the fire is an accident, and it will not be known that the cheese and butter have been stolen."

"I have been a bad man, but never a thief," said the thrall.

"You have been both thief and murderer, and now try to make yourself out an honest man," said Hallgerda. "If you don't go I will have you killed."

He was pretty sure that she would keep her word : so that night he took two horses and made his way to Kirkby. The dog knew him and did not bark at him, but ran up to greet him : lest it should make a noise, he killed it. Then he stole the food, loaded the horses, 10 set fire to the storehouse, and started for home. As he returned, the strap of his shoe broke, and he took the knife which was fixed to his belt to set the strap right. When he got to Lithend he missed the knife and belt, and remembered that he had left them lying on the ground : but he was afraid to go back for them.

After the Thing Gunnar rode home, and many of his neighbours with him. He asked them all to dine at Lithend, and was surprised to find that there was plenty of cheese and butter on the table. Gunnar knew that 20 there had been none in the house when he left home, and asked whence they came.

"It is no man's business to trouble himself about house-keeping," said Hallgerda.

Gunnar had suspected that the food was stolen, but now he felt sure of it. He got very angry and said, "It is ill if I am a partaker with thieves" : and as he spoke he gave her a slap on the cheek.

"I will bear that slap in mind and repay you for it," said she. She left the room in a rage, and he ordered 30 all the food to be taken away and meat to be brought in its place. His friends had not heard what had been

said, but they had seen the blow ; and when meat was brought in place of the cheese they guessed that the cheese had been got dishonestly.

A few days later Skamkell was riding after some sheep which had strayed, when he came upon a knife and a belt. He carried them to Kirkby and asked Otkell if he knew them. " Why, of course I do," said he ; " I gave them to the thrall whom I sold to Gunnar."

" Then how came they here ? " said Skamkell. " We  
10 will show them to Mord."

This Mord was a cousin of Gunnar, a spiteful, crafty fellow. Skamkell asked if Mord knew the knife. Mord said he did. They all suspected the truth now, but were puzzled how to do anything, for they were afraid of Gunnar.

" I could find out all that has happened at Lithend," said Mord.

" We will give you money if you find out the truth," said Otkell.

20 " I shall suffer for it if I take your money," he replied. " Yet perhaps I will make some enquiries."

Then they paid him, and being greedy as well as spiteful, he took the money, though he very much feared what Gunnar might do if he found out that he was spying on him. He hit upon a cunning plan. He called some women and gave them things to sell, and told them to bring all that they received in payment to him ; for he thought that if anyone had stolen Otkell's goods they would be glad to get rid of them, and would give  
30 them away at the first chance.

The women came back with big bundles. " Who gave you most ? " asked Mord.

"Hallgerda," said they.

"What did she give you?"

"Cheese."

"Show it me."

They did so, and he found that it was in large slices. Putting these together he saw that there was a whole cheese: and when he took it to Otkell's house he found that it exactly fitted into his wife's cheese-mould.

"Now," said Mord, "you know who stole the cheese"; and he went home thinking he had earned the money. 10

The story was told on all sides, and came to Kolskegg's ears.

"This is a bad business," he said to Gunnar. "Everyone is saying that Hallgerda robbed Otkell and burned down his storehouse."

"And I am afraid they tell the truth," said Gunnar. "What are we to do?"

"You should go to Otkell and offer a handsome atonement," said Kolskegg.

"You are right; we will do so," answered Gunnar. 20

So with eleven men, friends and relations, Gunnar rode to Kirkby, and there he found Otkell and his brothers. It was unlucky for them that Skamkell was in the house too. He insisted on going out with them when they went to greet Gunnar. He said that Otkell would need some one with wit to help him, and advised him to put on an air of importance. Otkell was a weak-minded sort of man. He meant no harm, but had fallen into the habit of depending on such fellows as Skamkell and Mord, and they often got him into trouble. 30

"Where are you going?" asked Otkell of Gunnar after they had bid each other good-day.

"No farther than this," replied Gunnar. "I have come to tell you about the burning of your storehouse, and how it was all the result of a plot between my wife and the thrall you sold us."

"It is what we expected you to do," said one of Otkell's brothers named Hallbjorn.

"Now I will make you a good offer," said Gunnar, "namely, that the best men in this part of the country shall decide what fine I am to pay."

10 "That *sounds* fair," said Skamkell, "but it is most unfair. You have many friends, and Otkell few."

"Then," said Gunnar, "I will pay you twice what you have lost."

Skamkell drew Otkell aside and said, "You shall not take this offer. You ought to make your own award, and it will be a disgrace to you if you let him make his."

So the silly Otkell said, "I will not let you make your own award."

20 "I see that you are influenced by one who will probably pay for this one day," said Gunnar: "but come, make your own award."

Otkell asked Skamkell what he should say to this, and he advised him to say that he would like to consult a friend of his named Gizur. Otkell did as he was bid, and Gunnar, after telling him that he was foolish to reject such good offers, rode home.

Hallbjorn blamed Otkell for his folly, and advised him to go and consult Gizur at once, for Gizur was a wise  
30 man. He started to do so, and Skamkell with him. Presently Skamkell, seeing that Otkell felt tired or lazy, said, "It is a strange thing that your brother didn't go

for you. I can see you find the journey tiresome. Let me go instead of you."

"Well, I will accept your offer," said Otkell, "but be as truthful as you can."

He turned back, and very sorry Hallbjorn was when he saw him return. He warned him that mischief must come of sending a liar on such an errand. Otkell jeered at him, saying he was afraid of Gunnar, and that Skamkell was the only one of his friends who had any courage.

Skamkell told the story to Gizur, who could not understand why such good offers should have been refused, and gave no counsel at all. Skamkell went back to Kirkby, and told Otkell that Gizur was against any friendly settlement: that he thought Otkell had behaved in a very spirited way: and that he advised them to begin a suit against Hallgerda for stealing the goods and against Gunnar for partaking of them. Hallbjorn was sure that this was a lie, but seeing that his brother's mind was made up, he rode with him to Lithend and summoned Gunnar and Halgerda. Gunnar was very 20 angry and went to see Njal.

"Don't worry about it," said Njal. "This will turn out to your honour. We will ride with you to the Thing, and aid you with advice and, if necessary, with force."

Midsummer came, and many friends rode with Njal and Gunnar to the Thing. Gunnar told Hrut the whole story, and Hrut asked what Njal's advice was.

"He told me to consult you," said Gunnar.

"Then challenge Gizur to fight if they don't leave 30 the award to you. As for Otkell and his crew we have enough men to fall on them and give them a lesson."

Gizur heard of this plan and asked Otkell who had advised him to bring the suit.

"Why, Skamkell told me that you had advised it."

"Where is the scoundrel who has told such a lie?" cried Gizur.

"He is sick," said Otkell.

"May he never rise from his bed!" said Gizur. "Now we must go and ask Gunnar to judge his own case. But I don't know whether he will do it now."

10 They did so, and Gunnar replied, "Then no doubt it is against your advice that I was summoned."

"I never gave such advice," said Gizur.

"You must clear yourself of the charge by a fitting proof."

"What proof do you ask?"

"You must swear that it is false."

"That I will do if you will consent to judge the case."

"I made that offer before. But now there is a greater  
20 matter to judge."

"The greater the matter, the more honour there is in judging it," said Njal.

"Well, I will do this to please my friends," said Gunnar, "but let Otkell take care that he does me no wrong in future."

So when Gizur had sworn that he had not advised the suit, Gunnar gave his judgement, which was this. The storehouse and food were to be paid for. Gunnar was to pay no fine for the bad conduct of his servant,  
30 because Otkell had hidden his faults when he sold him, but Otkell was to take him back again. On the other hand, since Otkell had summoned Gunnar in scorn and



mockery, he was to pay Gunnar a sum just equal to what Gunnar paid him for his loss.

Gizur said that he wished Gunnar to be Otkell's friend, but Gunnar replied that that should never be. If Otkell wanted a friend he could have Skamkell. Seeing that they could get no better terms, Gizur and Otkell accepted these, and before they parted Gunnar once more advised Otkell that it would be well for him to go to another part of the country: but that if he did not do so he would be wise to give no further cause of quarrel. 10

It would have been well for him had he taken this advice. He kept quiet till the next spring, and then said he would go and visit a friend. Seven others, of whom Skamkell was one, rode with him, and they had to ride near Lithend. They were galloping along, racing each other at times, and at last Otkell's horse ran away with him, left the path, and got into a field where Gunnar was sowing corn. He was stooping down, and Otkell did not see him. Suddenly Gunnar heard the sound of a horse's hoofs close to him and started up. 20 The horse dashed past him, but one of Otkell's spurs caught his ear and tore it badly.

Gunnar was angry, and complained of the way they treated him. Had Otkell explained that it was an accident and said he was sorry, all might have gone well: but the wretched Skamkell called out some mocking words, and Otkell said nothing at all. Gunnar warned them that when they next met him he would be armed, and they rode away.

He went home and said nothing about the matter 30 for a few days. Then he told Kolskegg, who said he was wrong to keep the thing secret: for if he did so,

and then attacked Otkell and Skamkell, everyone would say that he had acted without cause. After that, Gunnar told the story to his neighbours. Meanwhile the others had reached their friend's house, and bragged about what they had done. Skamkell declared that Gunnar had wept when his ear was torn.

"It is foolish to say such things," said their friend. "You will have to pay for your spite. When you go home you had better let me go with you, for Gunnar is  
10 my friend, and he will not attack me." But they would not have this. They said they were not afraid, but would cross the river lower down instead of using the ford near Lithend.

The day of their return one of Gunnar's shepherds came galloping to him with news that eight men were riding down the river bank.

"It must be Otkell's party," said Gunnar.

"I hear," said the shepherd, "that Skamkell says that you shed tears when they rode over you."

20 "Mere words don't do any harm," said Gunnar.

"But from this day you shall do no work except what you choose."

"Shall I go and call Kolskegg?" asked the shepherd.

"Go and sleep," said Gunnar. "I will tell Kolskegg."

The lad lay down and fell asleep at once. Gunnar did not call Kolskegg, but armed himself. When he picked up his bill, it sang aloud, and his mother heard it. She came to him and said that she had never seen him so angry before. Then she went into the sitting  
30 room, where there was a great noise of talking, and said, "You speak loud, but the bill made a louder noise when Gunnar went out."

Kolskegg said, "That is an omen of great things."

"It is well," said Hallgerda. "Now they will soon find whether he weeps over a hurt."

Kolskegg armed himself and hurried after Gunnar. Gunnar reached the ford which the others must cross, and tied up his horse. The eight men were now approaching along the other bank, and Gunnar called to them to guard themselves. They jumped from their horses, and Hallbjorn came on.

"Do not come near me," cried Gunnar. "I have no quarrel with you and do not wish to harm you. But if you attack me I shall not spare you."

"I cannot stand by and see you try to kill my brother," said he, and so saying he thrust at Gunnar with a spear. The spear pierced his shield, which he threw down. Then, having his left hand free, he drew his sword with it, and cut off Hallbjorn's hand at the wrist. Now he fought for a while with his bill in one hand and his sword in the other. Skamkell ran behind him and aimed a blow at him with a great axe, but Gunnar caught the blow on his bill, and, with a sudden twist, jerked the axe from Skamkell's grasp and threw it into the river. Then with a fierce thrust of the bill he pierced his body and, dropping his sword, he lifted him into the air and hurled him after his axe, crushing his head against a stone. A third man now cast a spear at Gunnar, but he saw it and caught it as it flew; then, throwing it back, he pinned his enemy to the earth. Otkell struck at Gunnar's leg with a sword, but Gunnar warded off the blow and slew him too with his bill. Now Kolskegg ran up and joined his brother: and before long every one of their eight foes lay dead.

Mord lived close by, and though he was told how his friends were fighting he refused to go and help them. He said he did not care if they were all killed, and his kinsman Gunnar too.

When Gunnar told Njal of the fight, he said, "You have done great things, but not before you had good cause."

"How will things go in future?" asked Gunnar.

"Shall I tell you?" said Njal. "You will ride to  
10 the Thing and get great honour. But this is only the beginning of your manslayings."

"But give me some advice," said Gunnar.

"Certainly," he replied. "Never kill more than one man of a family, and always keep the terms of any peace that may be made. If you do this, you will live long. But if you neglect my advice, your end will be near."

"I should have thought other men needed that advice more than I," said Gunnar.

"That may be," replied Njal. "Yet you will regret  
20 it, if you don't keep this in mind."

When midsummer came, suits for manslaughter were set on foot by Gizur, and as usual they came to nothing. Umpires were chosen to settle the matter out of court, and their decision was thought a just one. Skamkell, who had caused all the mischief, was to die unatoned: the death of Otkell was reckoned against the wound to Gunnar's ear: and Gunnar was to pay fines for all the other men whom he and Kolskegg had slain. Gunnar's friends helped him to pay the fines then and  
30 there, and so the quarrel ended. He gave great presents to all who had helped him, and was thought to have won great honour. So again, for a while, he had peace.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE HORSE-FIGHT, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE next trouble which befel Gunnar did not come from his wife. There were two men named Starkad and Egil who lived by a mountain called the Three-corner. Each of them had three sons and one daughter. The sons were tall, strong men, but very quarrelsome. They were always together, and always fighting with their neighbours, or plotting mischief of some sort. They were all at Starkad's house one day, and were looking at a horse of his, and saying what a fine beast it was. Egil's sons declared that there was not another 10 horse in the island like it. They said that it would be impossible to find a man who would dare to match his horse against Starkad's in a fight. Then Hildigunna, Starkad's daughter, said that she knew a man who would not be afraid; and when they asked her whom she meant, she said Gunnar. "Oh," said one of them, "though he put Gizur to shame, it does not follow that he will do the same to everyone. You women think no one can match him."

"You will fare worse than Gizur if you trouble him," 20 she replied.

"Don't meddle with Gunnar. Luck is always on his side," said Starkad.

"Yet you will give us leave to challenge him to a horse-fight?" they asked.

"Yes, provided you play him no trick," said their father.

They promised they would not, and took their way to Lithend. Gunnar welcomed them heartily, but when they began to talk about the fight he said that his horse was untried. He knew what sort of fellows they were, and wanted to have nothing to do with them, but when  
10 they told him that people said he was afraid to match his horse against theirs he was vexed, and agreed to the fight lest he should be laughed at. At the same time he begged them to let it be a fair fight for the sake of sport, and that no quarrel should come of it. He warned them that he would treat them as they treated him, and that if they stirred up a quarrel they must not blame him if he struck them hard.

On the appointed day many people came to see the horse-fight. A space was cleared, into which only  
20 the horses and their owners were to enter. Two of Starkad's sons led out their father's horse, and Skarphedinn offered to take out Gunnar's, but he preferred to drive it himself.

"It wouldn't be amiss that I should do so, though," said Skarphedinn, "for we are hot-headed on both sides."

"You would quarrel with them directly," said Gunnar. "It will take me longer to do so—but it will be all the same in the end."

Then they led the poor beasts towards each other  
30 and set them on to fight. For awhile they reared up on their hind legs and bit each other, and every one thought it was fine sport. But presently Starkad's

sons began to think their horse would be beaten, and resolved to try a trick. As the horses reared up they would push theirs against Gunnar's, and they hoped that this would throw the latter off its balance. Gunnar saw what they were about to do, and before they could do it he pushed his own beast in such a way that it knocked Starkad's off its legs, and it and Starkad's sons all lay in a heap on the ground together. The two men struggled up and rushed at Gunnar. He seized one of them and threw him to the ground so hard 10 as to stun him. The other one struck, not Gunnar but Gunnar's horse, and knocked one of its eyes out. Then Gunnar hit him with a riding rod which he had in his hand, and stunned him too. He turned to Kolskegg and said, "Cut off the poor beast's head. He shall not live maimed like that." Both parties took up weapons, but the crowd kept them apart. Njal tried to make peace, but Starkad's sons swore that they would never be satisfied till they had slain Gunnar for the blows he had given them. Both parties rode away and Gun- 20 nar's friends advised him never to ride alone, for the others would certainly attack him if he did.

Six months passed, and harvest time had come, when Gunnar told Njal that he was going to visit their friend Asgrim who lived at Tongue beyond the Three-corner. "Then tell no one of your plans, and take my sons with you," said Njal. Gunnar agreed to do so, but when the time for the journey came and Kolskegg asked, "Shall we tell Njal's sons?" he said, "No: they shall not fall into quarrels for me." He took his two brothers, 30 Kolskegg and Hjort, and these three, well armed, made their journey alone. They reached Tongue without

any adventure. Asgrim welcomed them gladly, and they spent a very pleasant week with him. When they said it was time for them to return, he made them handsome presents, and offered to go with them, but they said that there was no need of that.

Now Starkad had set a man named Sigurd to watch them, and presently he brought word that they proposed to return that very day, adding "We shall never have a better chance, for Gunnar has only two men with  
10 him."

"How many shall we need?" asked Starkad.

"It will not be safe to take fewer than thirty."

"Where shall we lie in wait?"

"Knafaholes will be a good place. There we can hide so that he will not see us till it is too late to escape."

"Go, then," said Starkad, "and tell Egil to meet us there with fourteen men. I will take fourteen from here."

Thorgeir, one of Starkad's sons, began to boast of how he would bring back Gunnar's head, and they all made  
20 ready to start.

Now Gunnar and his brothers rode homewards till they came in sight of Knafaholes, where they saw that men were hidden, for their spears stood up above the rocks behind which they lay.

"What's to be done?" asked Kolskegg. "I suppose you won't run away?"

"Certainly not," answered Gunnar, "We will ride past them to the Ness by the mouth of the river. That will be a good place to defend ourselves."

30 So they rode on fast, and someone called out "Where are you running to now, Gunnar?"

"Ask that when this day comes to an end," said he.



They hurried down to the Ness. At the end of it was a little rocky piece of rising ground. When they turned to face their enemies the sea was close behind them and the Rang River on their left, so that they were protected on two sides. Starkad urged his men to the attack, and as they were thirty to three they thought they should have an easy task, and came on at a great pace. Sigurd was first, and Gunnar shot at him. He held up his shield to catch the arrow, but that was little good, for it went through the shield, 10 entered his eye, and came out at the nape of his neck. Another man he shot in the stomach: he fell, and a man behind him tumbled over his dead body. At this last man Kolskegg cast a stone with such force that he broke his skull. It was something like the fight of Horatius. The fall of these three men checked the rush, and "Those behind cried 'Forward' while those in front cried 'Back.'" Starkad said, "It will never do to let him use his bow. Let us come on well and bravely." Each urged the other on, and at last they did advance. 20 Gunnar used his bow as long as he could, and then took his bill and sword and fought with both hands. Kolskegg helped him well, and they slew man after man. Thorgeir cried out to Gunnar, "I have vowed to take your head to my sister."

"That will not be a useful present," said he, "but you must come nearer to get it."

"Let us run on him all three at once," said Thorgeir to his brothers. "He has no shield, and we must kill him."

30

They rushed forward, but the braggart Thorgeir did not go so fast as the others. One of them aimed a blow

at Gunnar, but Gunnar struck the sword from his hand with his bill. Then, seeing the other within reach of the sword which he had in his left hand, he cut off his head with a single blow.

Kolskegg had just slain a man, when one of Egil's sons, throwing down his shield that he might run faster, rushed at him saying, "I have often said that we two should make an even match." As he spoke he thrust at Kolskegg with his spear, and wounded him in the  
10 thigh before he could turn. When he felt the wound he turned sharply enough, and cut off his enemy's leg with a single blow.

"Now," said the stricken man sadly, "I am sorry I did not carry a shield." He stood for a minute looking at the stump of his leg, and then fell dead. Seeing this, his father Egil ran at Gunnar. Gunnar thrust his bill right through his body, lifted him into the air, and dashed him into the river. Starkad had not done any fighting, but had contented himself with urging on the others.  
20 Now he turned to Egil's daughter's husband and said, "You sit by like a coward when your father-in-law is slain." This made the man so angry that he darted at Hjort (who had already killed two men) and thrust a sword through his heart. Gunnar saw this, and with a mighty blow of his bill hewed him in two at the waist.

So the battle went on for a while, but at last, when fourteen of his men lay dead, Starkad cried, "These are not men. Let us fly."

"You two will think it a sad thing if you have no  
30 mark to show that you have been in battle," said Gunnar. So he ran after them, and gave Starkad and Thorgeir each a wound in the back.

Then he and Kolskegg looked at the slain. They found fifteen corpses including Hjort's. Many men had been wounded. Of the families of Starkad and Egil five had fallen. One of Egil's sons had run away, but he had lost his hand. Starkad and Thorgeir, who were better at talking than at fighting, had, as we said before, been wounded in their flight.

The usual law-suit followed. Gunnar had struck the first blow at the horse-fight, and it was thought he might be outlawed. Njal however advised and defended 10 him, and though Mord took up Starkad's case he could do little. In the end umpires were chosen, who decided that Gunnar should pay fines at half the usual rate for eleven of the fourteen men they had killed, and this was thought a fair decision.

## CHAPTER V.

## GUNNAR'S LAST FIGHT.

OTKELL of Kirkby had left a son named Thorgeir. He was a brave man, and not ill-disposed, but he was too ready to be led away by flattery; and just as his father had been guided by Skamkell, so he was guided by the son of Starkad.

This last was very ill satisfied with the peace which had been made with Gunnar, and went to Mord to consult him. "I am not at all contented with the settlement that has been made," said he. "I have  
10 bought your help, and you must now make some plan which will bring about Gunnar's death. I will do much for you if you take pains in this matter."

"It will be difficult to do that without your seeming a peace-breaker," said Mord: "but I hear that Gunnar has taken a cornfield from Thorgeir of Kirkby, and so broken the settlement with him. Go to Kirkby, and talk to your namesake about this. Then you two shall lie in wait for him, and when it comes to a fight you shall keep back and let him rush on and be killed. I  
20 have heard that Njal has told Gunnar's fortune, and that if Gunnar kills twice in the same family, and does not keep to the terms of atonement, his end is near. Now he has already slain Otkell. If he kills his son

you can fly from the fight, and then, if he breaks the settlement, he will die."

Thorgeir agreed to this treacherous plan, and went off to see his namesake. He flattered him, and gave him a spear inlaid with gold, and they talked secretly all day. From this time they were the greatest friends. Kolskegg warned Gunnar that the two Thorgeirs meant mischief, but Gunnar only said that he should die when the appointed day came, and not before.

Kolskegg was quite right. Twice did they raise a 10 body of men to take Gunnar by surprise. The first time he was warned by Njal, who had dreamt that his friend was in danger, and the Thorgeirs were fined for their treachery. The second time they laid an ambush for him, and there was a fight like that at Knafaholes. In this Thorgeir of Kirkby was slain, and Starkad's son fled. Gunnar and Kolskegg, though they had only fought in self-defence, were fined and sentenced to banishment for three years.

"Take good care that you keep this atonement," 20 said Njal. "You will come home with great glory. But if you do not go abroad, you will break the atonement, and then you will be slain."

"I have no mind to break it," said Gunnar; and so they rode home.

Autumn came, and Gunnar and Kolskegg, hearing of a ship about to sail to Norway, arranged for their passages. They rode round the district to bid their friends farewell, and all were sorry to lose them. Gunnar said that they would see him no more, but they told 30 him that he would be back in three years, and would win more honour now than in his first voyage. The

day when the ship was to sail he embraced every man in his house, and then, leaning on the butt of his spear, he leapt on to his horse (for they had no stirrups in those days) and rode away with Kolskegg.

They got as far as the Markfleet without once looking back. There Gunnar's horse tripped, and he fell to the ground with his face towards home. "Fair is Lithend!" said he; "so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair. The cornfields are white, and the home  
10 meadow is mown: now will I ride home and not go abroad at all."

"Do not give this joy to your foes," said Kolskegg. "No man could think that you would break the atonement. And if you do so all will happen as Njal said."

"I will not go," said Gunnar; "and I wish you would stay too."

"That shall not be," he replied. "I will never act  
so basely. This is the one thing that could tear me from you. But if you *will* go back, tell my mother  
20 and my kinsman that they will see me no more: for I shall soon hear that you are dead, my brother, and then there will be nothing to bring me home again."

So they parted, and Kolskegg went to the ship. He sailed to Norway, and then went on to Denmark. There he was baptized, and there he stayed awhile, but he could not rest. His grief for the loss of his brother always drove him on. He went east into Russia, and then south as far as Constantinople. The last that is known of him is that he married a wife and became a  
30 captain of the Emperor's body-guard. But to Iceland he returned no more.

Gunnar went home. Hallgerda, though she had never

forgiven the blow he gave her when she stole Otkell's goods, was glad to see him back. She was proud of her husband, and thought he showed his courage by returning. His mother was sad, and felt that no good could come of this breach of his agreement.

Many of his friends had gone abroad that summer—his kinsman Thrain, Njal's sons Grim and Helgi, and others; so that people said that all the best men were leaving that part of the country. A cousin invited him to stay at his house in the far west, thinking he would be safer there, but he would not go. Njal offered to send Skarphedinn to Lithend, but Gunnar said that he would not drag other men into his quarrels. Njal replied that it would make no difference: that if Gunnar were slain he and his family must take up the quarrel. "That may be," said Gunnar, "but while I live you shall suffer from no quarrel of mine." He took no care of his own life, but rode to the local Things, and even to the Althing when midsummer came. There Gizur gave notice at the Hill of Laws that he was an outlaw: and before the Thing ended he called forty men to a council in the "Great Rift," a ravine which runs along one side of the plain where the Thing was held. Here he bade them join with him in an attack on Gunnar before the summer was over. Mord was to keep watch and tell them the best time for the attack. They thought that they would have no difficulty in killing him now that Kolskegg had gone. Gunnar heard of this, but took no more care of himself than he had done before.

30

At the time of haymaking he sent all his men to some islands of his, staying at Lithend with his wife and mother

only. Mord sent word to his friends that now was the time for their attack, and fixed a day and place of meeting. When they came together he said that they could not take Gunnar by surprise if his dog Sam was with him, and advised them to seize upon a neighbour of his named Thorkell whom the dog knew. This they did, and told Thorkell to go and fetch the dog, or he should be slain. He chose to save his life. There was a roadway between two fences above Lithend, and in  
10 this they hid themselves while Thorkell went on to the house. He had no trouble in getting Sam to follow him: but as soon as the dog saw the men hidden in the road he knew that some mischief was on foot, flew at Thorkell, and killed him. One of the others struck the faithful beast on the head with an axe, and as he died he gave a terrible howl. This awoke Gunnar, who said, "You have been badly treated, my poor Sam. This warning of yours means that I shall not long outlive you."

20 There was a loft above Gunnar's hall in which he slept. He was there now with his wife and mother. All the lower doors and windows were shut and barred. There were windows just under the roof fitted with shutters, and through one of these Gunnar looked out to see who his enemies were. He took care however that they should not see him. They soon came into sight, and everything was so still that they wondered whether Gunnar was at home. They sent one of their number on to see. He crept quietly to the house and began  
30 to climb up, thinking that he could peep through one of the windows without being noticed. Unfortunately for him he chose the window at which Gunnar was



watching. Gunnar thrust at him with his bill, his feet slipped, and he fell to the ground. He went back to the others, and Gizur asked, "Is he at home?" "Find that out for yourselves," said he; "but I am sure that his bill is at home." And with this grim jest he fell down dead.

They advanced towards the house, and Gunnar took to his bow. Several of them were wounded, so they took shelter in the outhouses from which they shot at him in return. The window-slit at which he stood was 10 so narrow that they could not harm him, but his arrows still found them out if they dared to show themselves in order to fire. A second rush at the house was as unsuccessful as the first. They tried a third time, and several attempted to climb up the walls; but everyone who did so was wounded with an arrow, so they retired to the outhouses once more. Gunnar saw a shaft sticking in the wall close to his window, and said, "I will shoot them with their own arrows, and that will be a shame to them." 20

"Don't do so, my son," said his mother. "They have retired, and you will only make them attack us again."

But Gunnar took the arrow and wounded a man with it. Gizur said, "Out came an arm yonder. There was a gold ring on it. Gunnar wouldn't look for arrows outside if he had plenty within. Let us attack him once more."

"Let us burn down the house," said Mord.

"I would not do such a thing to save my life," said Gizur. "Think of some other plan." 30

"There are some ropes lying here," said Mord. "Let us tie one end to the ends of the rafters and the other

to these rocks. Then by twisting them with levers we will drag the roof off the house."

In order to carry out this plan, they slipped round to the back of the house where there were no windows. Presently Gunnar heard a creaking of the rafters on which lay the thatch: then there was a great crash, and the roof gave way. Luckily no beam fell on any of the three people in the loft, but they were half buried in falling thatch, and half choked with dust. Now  
10 that the roof was gone, Gizur's friends thought they would be able to do more harm with stones and arrows, but still Gunnar, though he had been twice wounded, shot man after man. He could not protect more than one side of the house however, and now men might climb in anywhere: in fact one did climb in at the back, stole unnoticed across the room, and cut the string of Gunnar's bow. Gunnar swung round and thrust his bill through him. Another man climbed up. Gunnar struck at him and he fell to the ground with both arms  
20 broken. Then he turned to Hallgerda and asked her for two locks of her long hair, which she and her mother might twist into a new bowstring.

"Does much depend on that?" she asked.

"My life depends on it, for they will never come to close quarters if I can use my bow."

"Well," replied she, "call to mind the slap on the face you gave me. I care not whether you hold out for a long or a short time."

"You care nothing for my fame?" asked he. "Well,  
30 I will not ask a favour twice."

His mother scolded her and told her she would long bear the shame of causing her husband's death, but she

would not help him. Now man after man climbed into the loft and rushed on Gunnar. He had already slain two of his foes and wounded eight, and now in this hand-to-hand struggle he wounded eight more. But they attacked him before and behind. He had been twice struck by arrows in the earlier part of the fight, but had given no sign of pain. Now he received wound after wound. Thorgeir boasted that he was one of those who wounded him, and it may have been true: but we may guess that he was not one of the first to attack. 10 At last a cousin of Gizur got behind Gunnar and struck him on the head with an axe, so that he fell dead. All men stood still, half frightened at what they had done, half thinking that the mighty Gunnar could not really be dead. At last Gizur spoke.

"We have laid low a mighty chief. The fame of his defence will never be forgotten as long as men live in this land." Then turning to Gunnar's mother, he asked, "Will you grant us earth to bury our two dead?"

"Gladly," she replied, "but I would that it were 20 not only for two but for all of you."

"We pardon your rough words," said he, "for you have had a great loss." Then he gave orders that none should plunder the house.

But fear fell upon Thorgeir. He said he could not live at home after this deed lest the brothers of Thrain should attack him: so he asked help of Gizur, who promised that two of his relatives should live near Thorgeir for a while.

There was a great talk of this affair throughout the 30 country, and Gizur and his friends were much blamed, for most men loved and honoured Gunnar. But perhaps,

although he desired peace, he would not have wished to die differently. According to the belief of the time Walhalla could only be reached by death in battle. Cowards, and even brave men who died a natural death, must go to Nifflheim, a region of dark and cold in the far north; and there their souls must live in misery. That lot had not befallen Gunnar. He had in life been kindly, upright, and honest, generous and hospitable, a good friend and a terrible foe: and in  
10 death he showed no sign of fear. He did not even reproach his wretched wife when she forsook him in his last need: and though he broke the terms of the atonement for Thorgeir of Kirkby's death, he would not let a single friend share in the disaster which he thus brought upon himself. He was one of the noblest of the old Norse heroes.

## CHAPTER VI.

## HOW GUNNAR WAS AVENGED.

THRAIN'S brothers came to Njal to ask whether they could bring a suit for manslaughter against Gunnar's murderers, but he told them that it was impossible, for Gunnar had been declared an outlaw. The only thing they could do was to take the matter into their own hands and slay some of them.

They went to Lithend and built a cairn, or mound, over Gunnar's body, seating him upright in the midst of it. They would have buried his bill with him, for that was the Norse custom : but his mother said that 10 no one should touch it except the man who would avenge her son's death. As for Hallgerda, her mother-in-law was so angry with her that her life was not safe at Lithend ; so she fled to Gritwater, her son-in-law Thrain's house, taking with her her son Grani. He was a man whose disposition was very like his mother's ; but her other son Hogni was a brave man like his father, and he inherited Lithend.

And now a very strange thing happened. Two servants were passing by Gunnar's cairn and heard, or 20 thought they heard, their old master singing. They told their mistress, and she sent them to Njal. He made them tell the story three times over, and then told

Skarphedinn to take his weapons and go to Lithend. No one had dared to tell Hogni the story, because he was not ready to believe strange tales. Skarphedinn talked with him for a while and then they walked out to Gunnar's cairn. The moon was shining brightly : but as they neared the mound clouds drifted over it, and it seemed to them that the cairn opened. Looking in, they saw four lights which cast no shadow, and amidst them sat Gunnar with a merry face singing a  
10 song about his last fight, and how Hogni would avenge him. When the song was finished the cairn closed again.

" Would you believe such things if Njal and I told you them ? " asked Skarphedinn.

" I would believe them if Njal told them, for he never tells lies."

" This means much," said Skarphedinn. " He shows us that we ought to die rather than yield to our foes. He has taught us what to do."

20 " I can do nothing without your help," said Hogni.

" My father and I owe much to Gunnar. I will do all that I can for you," replied Skarphedinn. " We will set off at once, this very night : for if they know I am here they will be more careful."

" So be it," said Hogni, and they took down their weapons from the wall. As Hogni took his father's bill it gave a loud ringing sound, and his grandmother sprang from her bed, saying angrily,

30 " Who touches the bill when I forbade everyone to lay hands on it ? "

" I mean," said Hogni, " to take it to my father, that he may have it in Walhalla."

"Rather bear it to avenge your father," said she, "for it has spoken of at least one man's death."

So Hogni went out and told Skarphedinn what his grandmother had said. They went first to the house where Gizur's two kinsmen had settled to guard Thorgeir. One of them was the man who had struck Gunnar the fatal blow. They found a flock of sheep close by and drove it towards the house, that the inmates might think thieves were robbing them. They heard the noise and hurried out to protect their property. Skarphedinn 10 called to them, "It is as it seems. Men are here." Then he cut down one of them. Gunnar's murderer charged Hogni with a spear, but Hogni cut the spear shaft in two and thrust the bill through his body.

Now they went on to Starkad's house. It was a low one, and Skarphedinn jumped on the roof and plucked at the thatch. Starkad and Thorgeir thought that goats were eating it, so ran out to drive them off. When they saw Skarphedinn, Starkad tried to run away, but Skar- 20 phedinn was too quick for him, caught him before he got out of the yard, and cut him down. Meantime Hogni had slain Thorgeir.

They went to Mord's house, and found him out in his field, for it was now morning. He begged hard for his life and offered any atonement they might ask for Gunnar's death. Skarphedinn told him how they had already slain four men, adding, "You shall go on a like journey if you do not give Hogni the right to make his own award." Hogni said that he had made up his 30 mind to take nothing but the lives of the slayers of his father: but after much talk he was persuaded by

Skarphedinn to agree to what he had suggested. So they left Mord in peace and went home.

Njal took great pains to get the relations of Starkad to agree to an atonement, and at last a district meeting was called to settle the terms. Fines were awarded for the slaying of the four men, but Hogni had the last word: for as soon as the awards had been fixed he gave his award, which was that the miserly coward Mord should pay all his and Skarphedinn's fines.

- 10 We have seen that these atonements were very often useless. Someone would be discontented, and the quarrel would break out again. But it was not so in this case. Hogni thought that his revenge was sufficient: Skarphedinn was content since Hogni was so: Gizur and the better men among his followers were rather ashamed of the victory of forty men over one: and fellows such as Mord were afraid. And so it fell out that Hogni remained friends with Gizur till the day of his death.



## PART II. NJAL AND HIS SONS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### KARI COMES INTO THE STORY.

WE have seen that before Kolskegg went abroad Thrain, Helgi, and Grim had left Iceland. The first went to Norway. Earl Hacon, the ruler of the country, received him gladly, for he remembered Gunnar and so welcomed his kinsman. Thrain entered his service and stayed with him two winters : and so pleased was Hacon with his skill and courage that he gave him a ship called the "Vulture," the fastest vessel in Norway.

Grim and Helgi meant to go to Norway too, but there sprang up a strong wind which drove them far to the south. Then there came a thick mist, so that they did not know where they were going. At last they heard the sound of breaking waves, and knew they must be near some land : but when Njal's sons asked the captain of the ship what the land was likely to be, he could not tell them. It might be the Orkneys, he said, or Scotland, or Ireland. The mist lasted for two days more, and still they sailed slowly towards the south. At last the weather became a little better, and they found themselves in a firth with land on both sides of them, and great waves 20

breaking on the rocks ahead. They cast anchor and waited for the wind to grow less. Next morning it was calm, but they could not sail away as they had hoped, for they saw thirteen ships coming into the firth.

"What shall we do?" asked the captain, "for these men mean to fall upon us."

They had not much time to consider, for the ships came on fast. Each party asked the names of the other, and they found that the thirteen ships were commanded 10 by two relatives of the King of Scotland. "And now," said one of these men, "we give you two choices. Either you shall go ashore and we will take your goods, or we will fall on you and slay every man that we catch."

"Our will is to defend ourselves," said Helgi.

The merchants were very angry with him, saying that their lives were worth more than their goods: but Grim shouted out a defiance, so that the vikings (or pirates) came on at once. Then the merchants saw that there was nothing else to be done, so took up their 20 weapons and vowed to stand by each other to the death.

The vikings shot at them, but they caught most of the arrows on their shields. A ship came alongside, and one of the Scottish leaders leapt aboard and killed the captain. Grim thrust at him with a spear, and knocked him into the sea. Then Helgi came to help Grim, and they drove back the vikings whenever they tried to board them. Yet one ship could not fight long against thirteen, and the vikings began to call to them to yield before they were all destroyed by arrows or 30 darts. They said they would never yield; and just then some one looked seaward and saw ten more ships coming towards them. By the mast of the first of them

stood a tall fair-haired man, clad in a silk cloak, wearing a gilt helmet, and holding in his hand a spear inlaid with gold.

"Who are playing this uneven game?" he cried.

Helgi told his name and those of the leading Scotsmen.

"Who are your captains?" he asked again.

Helgi named the two owners of the ship and said that one of them was slain.

"Are you from Iceland?"

"Sure enough we are."

10

"Whose sons are you?"

"We are Njal's sons, Grim and Helgi."

"Your names are well known, both father and sons."

"But who are you?" asked Helgi.

"My name is Kari, and I come from the Hebrides."

"Then you are welcome if you will give us a little help."

"I'll give you all the help you need: but what do you ask?"

"To fall on them," said Helgi.

20

"So be it," said Kari.

The vikings had retreated up the bay. There was no wind now, so the eleven boats rowed after them as fast as they could, and the battle began again. Kari leapt on board the ship of one of the leaders named Snowealf, who turned and struck at him with his sword. Kari leapt back over a beam which lay across the ship, and the sword stuck fast in the beam. Then Kari smote him his deathblow on the shoulder. The other leader hurled a spear at Kari, but he sprang aloft and 30 it missed him. Just then Helgi and Grim came to his help, and Helgi thrust his spear through his opponent.

The Scots were now leaderless, and soon called for mercy, which was granted them. But Kari and his new friends took all their goods and divided them amongst themselves.

Now Kari told Helgi and Grim that he was one of the body-guard of Earl Sigurd, ruler of the Orkneys, and took them with him to the Earl's court on Pomona. When the Earl heard who they were and how Kari had found them, he invited them to stay with him and join his  
10 body-guard. This they agreed to do. They fought for him in Scotland the following summer, and did him good service. Then they went sea-roving with Kari, and returned to spend a second winter with the Earl. After that they asked Sigurd's leave to go and trade in Norway, and as Kari had to take Sigurd's tribute to Earl Hacon he promised to meet them there. Sigurd gave them a ship, and they made a prosperous voyage to Hlada. There they found Thrain in the "Vulture" almost ready to sail for Iceland.

20 It so happened that Earl Hacon was in that neighbourhood, and that he was very angry; for an Icelfander named Hrapp had just plundered and burnt down a shrine which belonged to the Earl. He had left Iceland because he had committed a murder there: had been kindly received in Norway, and had repaid the kindness by outrage and murder: and now to crown all had burnt down a temple. Hacon was in pursuit of him, and he fled to the harbour.

"Help me, good men and true!" said he to Grim  
30 and Helgi.

"You look an unlucky man," said Helgi, "and the man who doesn't help you will have the best of it."

He turned from them with a curse, and begged help of Thrain.

"What have you done?" asked Thrain.

"I have burnt a shrine under the Earl's eyes and killed some men. The Earl will be here directly in pursuit of me."

"It isn't fitting that I should help you when the Earl has been so good to me," replied Thrain.

Then Hrapp tried to bribe him with the precious things he had stolen from the shrine, but Thrain would not take them.

"Then," said Hrapp, "I will stand here and be slain before your eyes, and every one will blame you for it."

They saw the Earl coming with his followers, and Thrain was sorry for the man, scoundrel though he was, and so consented to hide him. He took him in his boat, and when they got to the ship he made his men knock the bottoms out of two casks, put Hrapp into them, lashed them together, and lowered them over the side of the ship.

20

The Earl came to Njal's sons and asked whether they had seen Hrapp and where he had gone. They said that he had been there, but that they didn't know where he then was. The Earl said that he would give great honour to the man who helped him to find his enemy, but they told him nothing more, so he turned aside to question their men.

Grim said to Helgi in a low tone, "Why should we not tell him? What will Thrain do for us if we keep his secret?"

30

"We should not think of that when his life is at stake," replied Helgi.

"Perhaps the Earl will turn on us, for he is so angry that he won't rest till he has done some one a mischief."

"That mustn't move us," said Helgi. "But we will row away from the shore and put to sea as soon as the wind serves." So they rowed out to a little island and waited there.

"Now," said the Earl, "I will go to Thrain, my brother in arms. He will give Hrapp up if he knows anything of him."

10 However Thrain denied all knowledge of Hrapp and bade the Earl search the ship. He searched in vain and returned to the shore. Not finding Hrapp there, he felt sure he must be on the "Vulture," and would have searched her again, but a breeze sprang up and she sailed away. It was useless to pursue the swiftest ship in Norway, so, in a great rage, he said to his son, "Let us take four war-ships and go against Njal's sons."

"It is bad to let the guilty escape and then punish the innocent," replied he.

20 "I will have my way in this," said the Earl. So they took their four ships, and soon saw Helgi's vessel by the little island. Grim saw them coming and said "These ships mean us no good."

"We must do the best we can," said Helgi.

The Earl came up and called to them to surrender, but Helgi said they would defend themselves as long as they could. Then the Earl called to the crew, saying that he would spare them all if they would give up Helgi: but they loved him so well that they said they  
30 would rather die with him.

The Earl and his men pressed on, and a fight began. One man boarded Helgi's ship three times, and then

Grim slew him with a spear. Soon after Helgi killed the Earl's banner-bearer. But the odds were too heavy for the fight to last long. The Earl's son and a band of men jumped on board, surrounded the two brothers, thrust them down with their shields, and so took them prisoners. The Earl wished to slay them and their comrades at once, but his son persuaded him to spare them until the morning. His father bade him bind them, and though he said it was a shame to kill such brave men the Earl would not listen to him. Their 10 hands were bound with cords, their legs chained, and they were left to sleep if they could. The pain caused by their bonds kept them awake when every one else was asleep; so they talked to each other in low tones, and agreed to try to escape. There was an axe lying near them, and Grim crawled to it, and managed, by rubbing his cords against its edge to cut them through. It was not an easy task, for his hands were bound behind his back, and he cut them badly: but he succeeded at last, and then picked up the axe and freed Helgi. They 20 crawled to the side of the ship, and got ashore so quietly that no one heard them. Walking across the island they found some stones with which they knocked the fetters off their legs, and then they slept till dawn.

When they awoke they saw a large ship close by them, and what was their joy when they found that it was Kari's! He too was very glad to see them and offered them help; but when they asked him to go and fight Hacon he said he could not, for he had come to pay 30 Sigurd's tribute to him.

When he had done his business he took them back to Orkney, and there they spent the winter. Then once

more they went sea-roving with him and won much wealth. But before doing this they made Kari promise that he would return to Iceland with them.

Summer came and Kari kept his promise. They had a good voyage, and Njal welcomed his sons' friend gladly. Kari stayed at Bergthorsknoll through the winter, and he thought that he had never seen such a woman as Njal's daughter. Each day he admired her more and more, and when spring came he asked Njal for her hand.

10 She was willing enough to marry a fine fellow like Kari, and so it fell out that they were married a fortnight before midsummer. Njal bought him a farm, but he did not care to leave his friends, and his wife too preferred her own home: so they put a steward in the farm and spent most of their time at Bergthorsknoll.



## CHAPTER II.

## NJAL'S SONS QUARREL WITH THRAIN.

WHEN Thrain returned from Norway he took Hrapp home to Gritwater. He had been unwilling to take his part against Hacon; but having done so he made a friend of the man and gave him a farm. Hrapp did not spend much of his time there, but lived chiefly at Gritwater. He became very friendly with Hallgerda, and was always working some mischief; and by his means Thrain came to be much less respected by his neighbours than he had been before he went abroad. He never expressed any sorrow for the trouble that 10 had come to Grim and Helgi on his account, and did not even thank them for shielding him.

One day Thrain's brother Kettle, who had married one of Njal's daughters, came to Bergthorsknoll, and Grim told him that Thrain was treating them very badly. They had lost their ship, and nearly lost their lives on his account, and he ought to make amends for what they had suffered. Kettle thought so too, and Njal asked him to speak to Thrain on the subject. Kettle did this, but Thrain only lost his temper. Then, after consulting 20 their father, the two brothers sent Kari to remonstrate with Thrain; but he, instead of admitting that he was in the wrong, quarrelled with Kari, and abused Grim

and Helgi. Kari would not tell them what Thrain had said, but warned them that if they met him he would insult them to their faces. He told them also that wherever Thrain went he took seven men with him, among whom were Grani and Hrapp, and that these two were his chief advisers, and the cause of all the trouble.

At last Njal's four sons and Kari rode to Gritwater together. Thrain came into the porch to meet them. 10 His companions and servants stood around him, and Grani and Hrapp one on each side of him.

"Are we welcome here?" asked Skarphedinn.

"None of those who are here will say you are welcome," said Hallgerda, who was standing behind the men.

Then Skarphedinn sang a mocking song about her, and she told him that he should suffer for his ill words.

"I am come to see you, Thrain," said Helgi, "and to know if you will make amends for what we suffered for 20 you in Norway."

"I never knew," sneered Thrain, "that you sold your manhood for money."

"Many will say that you ought to offer us an atonement since your life was at stake," said Helgi.

"It was just luck that you suffered what you deserved while we got away," said Hrapp.

"There was little luck in getting you for a friend instead of Hacon," retorted Helgi.

"Don't bandy words with Hrapp," said Skarphedinn. 30 "It would be better to give him a thrashing."

"Hold your tongue, Skarphedinn," cried Hrapp, "or I will split your head open with my axe."

"It will soon be known which of us will scatter gravel on the other's head," answered Skarphedinn.

"Go away home to the Beardless Carle, you Dung-beardlings," said Hallgerda.

The others all joined in using these mocking words except Thrain. He remembered how Gunnar had declared at the Thing that all who used them should be outlaws, and he forbade all his followers to use them. But he was too late: the mischief was done, and an insult had been offered which would never be forgiven. 10

Njal's sons told their father, who asked them if they had called any witnesses to hear the words. "No," they said, "we will follow up the suit on the battle-field."

"No one will think you have courage to lift your weapons," said Bergthora.

"Spare your tongue, wife," said Njal; "they will be eager enough to fight without your urging." So they all talked the matter over for a long time, but let no one know what they meant to do. News of the quarrel spread, however, and every one thought that it 20 would end in bloodshed.

Some weeks later Thrain went to visit his brother Kettle, and took his body-guard of seven with him. Kettle begged him to offer an atonement, but he got angry, and said that he would pay nothing: he was more than a match for all his foes, he said. He was warned that they were dangerous, but boasted that he was not afraid of them. The date fixed for his return came, and he was advised that it would not be wise to go that day, as Njal's sons would be expecting him; 30 but he said that it would be a sign of fear if he stayed, and go he would. So the party set out.

Bergthora had heard from some beggar women who had met Thrain's party that he had gone to Kettle's, and meant to return on a certain day. She told Kari, and he told the others. Early in the morning of the day when Thrain set out, Njal heard Skarphedinn's axe strike against the door of the closet in which he slept. He got up, and found Kari and his sons armed and wearing bright holiday clothes.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

10 "On a sheep hunt," said Skarphedinn.

"So you said once before," said Njal, "but then you hunted men."

Skarphedinn laughed and said, "Do you hear what my father says? He seems to doubt my word."

"When did you speak thus before?" asked Kari.

"When I slew Gunnar's kinsman Sigmund."

"For what?" asked Kari.

"He had slain my foster-father Thord."

Njal lay down again, but the others went on to a place  
20 where they could watch the Markfleet which Thrain must cross on his way home. Winter was coming on and ice had begun to form on both sides of the river. In some places it stretched from bank to bank and formed bridges by which men could cross. Presently they saw Thrain's party coming along. Suddenly they turned down the stream, and Skarphedinn said, "They have seen us. It is no use to wait for them here. We must go and meet them."

"There are eight of them," said Kari, "and we are  
30 only five."

Running down the bank, they saw a bridge of ice a little below where Thrain's party was, and hastened

to cross it. Thrain and his men stopped on the ice a little above the bridge. Thrain threw off his cloak and took off his helmet to cool his head before the fight.

Just then Skarphedinn's shoe-string snapped, and he stopped to tie it up.

"Why so slow, Skarphedinn?" asked Grim.

"I am tying my shoe."

"Let us go on," said Kari. "He will be there as soon as we." So they ran on towards the bridge as fast as they could. As soon as he was ready Skarphedinn<sup>10</sup> rose and ran straight down to the Fleet. It was much too deep for him to ford it. He took a leap into the air, cleared the water, and alighted on the ice on which Thrain's party stood. The ice was very slippery, and when he touched it he slid right into the midst of the enemy, as fast as a bird flies. His axe was in his hand, and as he passed Thrain he dealt a terrible blow at his unprotected head, cleft it in two so that his teeth fell out on the ice, and glided on before any one could get a blow at him in return. One of them threw a shield<sup>20</sup> before him to trip him up, but he leapt over it, and slid right on to the bank. There he met Kari and his brothers.

"That was done like a man," said Kari.

"Your share is still to be done," he replied.

"And we will do it," said Helgi as they rushed on the foe.

Grim and Helgi made for Hrapp. He aimed a blow at Grim, but missed him, and Helgi cut off his arm.

"That was a very needful thing to do," said Hrapp, "for that arm of mine has slain many a man."<sup>30</sup>

Grim ended his boasting by running a spear through him. Kari leapt over a spear cast at him by another

man and then slew him. Meanwhile Skarphedinn had caught Grani and Gunnar Lambi's son (a nephew of Thrain's) by the back of their necks, and held them so firmly that they could not escape.

"Here I have caught two puppies," he said. "What shall I do with them?"

"You can slay either or both of them if you wish," said Helgi.

"I cannot find it in my heart to slay the brother of  
10 Hogni whom I love," said Skarphedinn.

"The day will come when you will wish you had done so," said Helgi. "They will never be true to you, nor will any who are here now."

"I shall not fear them," said Skarphedinn: so they granted peace to the five men who were still alive. Then they measured the jump Skarphedinn had taken, and found it was twenty-four feet.

They told Njal what they had done. He said it was a great deed, but that he feared ill would come of it.  
20 Kettle, being both Thrain's brother and Njal's son-in-law, worked hard to bring about a peace. He called all his brothers together and talked to them. Hogni too begged them to accept an atonement, and to this they at last agreed. They chose men to fix the fine to be paid by Njal, and he accepted their award. Kettle took Thrain's son Hauskuld, a boy about six years of age, to his home, and promised always to be his friend, and to treat him as if he were his own son.

A few years later Njal paid a visit to Kettle, and in  
30 the evening he called little Hauskuld and showed him a gold ring. The boy took it and put it on his finger.

"Will you take it as a gift?" asked Njal.

"That I will," said the boy.

"Do you know how your father died?" asked Njal again. For he thought that perhaps the boy would not take a present from him if he knew this.

"I know that Skarphedinn slew him," said Hauskuld; "but we need not mind that since we have taken an atonement."

"Better answered than asked," said Njal; "you will grow to be a good man and true."

"That is worth hearing from you," said the boy, 10  
"for you know the future and tell the truth."

"Now I will be your foster-father if you consent," said Njal.

The boy was very glad to hear this, and, as Kettle also consented, Njal took him home. He and his sons grew very fond of him and they taught him all they could. He grew up tall, strong and handsome: he was merry of speech, generous, and well-behaved; courteous, well trained in arms, and much beloved. Njal's sons and he were never apart, and were always of one mind. 20

## CHAPTER III.

## HAUSKULD'S MARRIAGE.

BEFORE going on with the story it is necessary to say a few words about the government of Iceland. There was no king, and, as we have seen, people generally did very much as they liked if they were strong enough. They loved and revered the law which had gradually grown up, though their chiefs often broke it. When the first immigrants came to the island the leader of an expedition chose some empty spot and his followers settled around him. They looked up to him as their  
10 chief; and as he conducted the worship of their gods they called him a priest. His son generally succeeded to the priesthood, but it could be given away or sold. The priest's followers were not bound very closely to him, but could go away and settle under some other priest if they liked. As time went on the number of priesthoods was fixed at a hundred and forty-four, thirty-six for each quarter of the island, and the priests were the judges of the four quarter courts which met at the yearly Thing.

20 In the years which followed the events described in the last chapter, a change had come over Iceland. Hacon of Norway had been murdered, and had been succeeded by Olaf, who was a Christian. He made Christianity



the faith of Norway, and sent missionaries to convert Iceland. Partly by preaching and partly by fighting they persuaded the Icelanders that Christianity was better than paganism. Almost half the people had changed their faith at the time of the Althing of the year 1002. Then it was agreed that it would never do to have half the people obeying one law and the other half another; so a man was chosen to say what should be the faith of the island. He was a pagan, but, after lying on his face for many hours as if seeking the guidance of God, he declared that it should be Christianity. People were to give up eating horseflesh (which the Christians regarded as barbarous), the worship of Thor and Odin, and other evil practices—or if these things were done at all, they must be done in secret. A few years later there were so few pagans left that they made it illegal to do such things even privately. As for the violence and blood-feuds which had disgraced the island, they went on as before. The conversion was too sudden to be very sincere; and no one seems to have thought that revenge was out of keeping with a religion whose first precept is love. 10 20

Years went by and Hauskuld was old enough to be married. Njal looked around, and thought that he could find no better wife for his beloved foster-son than Hildigunna, the niece of Flosi of Swinefell, of whom we shall hear much hereafter. Hildigunna was a beautiful woman. She was generous to all who were in distress, but she was proud, and very revengeful. Njal and Hauskuld rode to Swinefell and were welcomed heartily. 30 Next day Njal and Flosi walked out together and Njal asked for the hand of Hildigunna for his foster-son.

"What have you to say of Hauskuld?" asked Flosi.

"Much that is good," replied Njal; "besides I will lay down as much money as you think is necessary for the making of the match."

"We will call my niece here," said Flosi, "and see what she says about it."

"I do not know much about him," said Hildigunna, when she was told of the proposal, "but what I object to chiefly is this. You promised me that you would  
10 never marry me to anyone who is not a priest, and Hauskuld has no priesthood or leadership over men."

"That is quite enough," said Flosi. "If you object we will say no more about the matter."

"No," said she, "I do not say that I will not marry him if they can get him a priesthood. But if they cannot I will not have him."

"Then let the matter wait for three winters," said Njal, "and I will see what I can do."

"I will only bargain for this one thing," said Hildi-  
20 gunna; "that I stay here in the east."

Njal said that they would leave that to Hauskuld, and Hauskuld said that he would rather live near his foster-father; so that matter was left unsettled.

Njal tried to get a priesthood for Hauskuld, but no one was willing to sell one: so he thought of a cunning plan. There were more suits than usual at the Thing that summer, and many men came to Njal for advice. Instead of advising them well as he generally did, he gave them such counsel that their suits came to nothing,  
30 and their quarrels were left unsettled. Next year Njal went to the Thing again, and when the proper day came he advised men to give notice of their suits. They said,

"What is the use of that? The courts settle nothing, and it is better to decide matters with spear and sword."

"That must not be," said Njal. "It will never do to have no law in the land. Let us call men together and talk of what shall be done."

So a meeting was called, and Njal addressed the "Speaker of the Law"—a man whose word was always final if there was any doubt as to what the law was—and said, "Our law-suits have all fallen into confusion, for the Quarter Courts cannot decide them. Therefore 10 I propose that a Fifth Court be established."

"How can that be?" asked the Speaker. "Who can be judges in the Fifth Court?"

"There shall be twelve new priesthoods in each quarter," said Njal. "They shall be given to the best men. Then when any suit is to be tried, twelve of these forty-eight shall be removed, six by the plaintiff and six by the defendant, and so only the proper number, thirty-six, will remain."

"And what is the good of the Fifth Court?" asked 20 the Speaker.

"It shall try all cases which the Quarter Courts cannot settle, and all cases of contempt of court. And it shall be an offence for which a man may be outlawed if he takes any fee for pleading in the Fifth Court."

The plan seemed a good one, and after some further talk the Speaker declared that Njal's suggestions should become law. Then they selected twelve men from each quarter, and Njal begged that Hauskuld should be one of those from the south. This was agreed to, and 30 Hauskuld was made the "Priest of Whiteness." Thus Njal's trick was successful. But he had to pay dearly

for his cunning, for this winning of the priesthood cost the life of Hauskuld and of many others.

Njal rode home, and soon after went once more to Flosi. There was now no difficulty about the marriage. The bride and bridegroom spent the winter at Bergthorsknoll, and then Njal bought them land at Ossaby. Hildigunna and Bergthora loved each other dearly; and though Hauskuld had now a home of his own, it was generally the case that if he was not at Bergthorsknoll  
10 some of Njal's family were at Ossaby. He dwelt there for a long time and was much honoured. Many men forsook other priesthods to come into his: and of that came trouble, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MURDER OF HAUSKULD.

MORD's father had been a long time from home. Before going away he had handed over his priesthood to his son; and when he returned he was very much dissatisfied with the way things had been managed in his absence. He went to spend the winter with Mord, and the more he saw the more discontented he grew.

"I have ridden far and wide over the district," he said one evening, "and I do not know it for the same. At Whiteness I saw many new houses, and much ground levelled for building. Here houses are deserted or in ruins. What is the meaning of all this?"

"New priesthoods have been set up," said Mord, "and men have gone from my Thing to Hauskuld's."

"You have repaid me ill for handing over my priesthood to you," said his father. "You have not acted like a man. Now you must do something to bring our enemies to their death. And the best thing you can do is to bring about a quarrel between Njal's sons and Hauskuld. He has many friends, and if they slay him they will themselves be slain by the kinsmen of Hauskuld and his wife."

"I shall never be able to do that," said Mord.

"I will give you a plan," said his father. "You shall

ask Njal's sons to your house and give them great gifts. Then when they think you a firm friend of theirs you shall slander Hauskuld, and so stir up a quarrel. So you will be avenged on Skarphedinn who made you pay his fines after Gunnar's death: and when they are all dead and gone you can seize on the priesthood of Whiteness."

They talked the matter over for a little while, and Mord agreed to do as his father advised. But this  
10 wicked old man never saw his plan carried out, for he died before the winter was over.

A few weeks after his father's death Mord rode over to Bergthorsknoll and saw Skarphedinn. He flattered him and talked to him the whole day, saying that he wished for his friendship. Skarphedinn was surprised, for Mord had never said anything of the sort before. Yet he was pleased with his smooth words and was inclined to be friendly. Helgi and Grim were always ready to do as Skarphedinn did, so a great friendship  
20 sprang up between the four; and Kari also, who did not know much of Mord's character, was deceived by his fair speeches. Njal disliked Mord's coming to his house, and was often angry with him: but his sons cared less for their father's opinion than they had done in former days. They thought he was old, and was losing his wits.

One day Mord invited Skarphedinn, Helgi, Grim, and Kari to a feast, promising to give them great presents. They gladly accepted the invitation, and many men  
30 were at the feast. Before they went home Mord gave a gold brooch to Skarphedinn, a silver belt to Kari, and other handsome gifts to the other two. They took

the presents home and showed them to their friends with great pride, but Njal said, "You will pay full dearly for these presents. Mind you do not give Mord what he wants to get in return for them." They paid no heed to the old man, and for a while Mord took no steps to stir up the quarrel which he and his father had planned.

Soon after, Njal's sons made a feast for Hauskuld, and before he went home they gave him handsome presents, among which was a fine horse. It had never yet been tried in a fight, but was a splendid beast. Then 10 Hauskuld invited them to Ossaby, and asked many men to meet them. It chanced that he was just then rebuilding his house. He had pulled down his hall, and built three large outhouses, so he asked his guests to sleep in these new buildings. As was the custom, he gave good gifts to all his friends before they went away, and rode part of the way home with Njal's sons, the brothers of Thrain and a number of their friends following at a short distance. Both parties vowed that nothing should ever break their friendship : but they reckoned 20 without Mord.

His first attempt at mischief was at Ossaby. Soon after Hauskuld's feast he paid him a visit, and asked him to walk with him. After flattering his host for a while he said,

"What a difference there is between you and Njal's sons! You gave them good gifts after your feast, while their gifts to you were only given in mockery."

"They are my brothers," replied Hauskuld, "and the best fellows in the world. But how do you make out 30 that their gifts were a mockery?"

"They gave you a horse which they said was untried

in fight. By that they meant to mock you because you are untried."

Hauskuld got angry at this and said that Mord was talking nonsense, but he went on,

"They envy you your priesthood. When you did not attend the Thing, Skarphedinn took it as if it were his own, and he never means to let it go."

"That is not true," said Hauskuld. "I got it back at the meeting last harvest."

10 "Well, that was Njal's doing, not Skarphedinn's," said Mord, and then he began to accuse them of the slaying of an uncle of Hauskuld's, though they had really had nothing to do with it.

"I do not mean to blame them for that," said Hauskuld.

"At all events," said Mord, "you cannot deny that one day, when you were going to Markfleet with Skarphedinn, an axe fell from his belt, and that but for that he would have slain you."

20 "It was his woodman's axe," said Hauskuld. "I saw him put it there, and he meant no treachery. And now, Mord, I just tell you this: I am not going to listen to your slander, for I will never believe anything against my good friends. Even if there were any truth in these things, I would rather be killed by them than do them any harm. You show your own evil nature by saying such things, and I will not listen to you any longer."

So he left him, and Mord went home. He saw that he should do no good by talking to Hauskuld, and  
30 resolved to slander him to Njal's sons, and see if they would believe him. The very next time he saw them he began.



"I have been told," said he, "that Hauskuld is saying that you, Skarphedinn, were guilty of the death of his uncle: he says too that you meant treachery against him when you two rode to Markfleet. But his own treachery is far worse. He asked you to a feast, and put you in the outhouse farthest from his house. There was fire-wood piled round it, and he meant to burn you all inside, and would have done so had not Hogni come there, so that he was afraid to attack you. Again, when you were coming home Thrain's brothers 10 followed you closely, and he had plotted with them to attack you, but they were afraid."

They were angry with him when they heard this, and spoke up for Hauskuld: but the cunning fellow brought so many pieces of evidence that at last they began to believe him. From that day forward they were very cold towards Hauskuld, and scarcely spoke to him when they met. He was sorry, but was too proud to ask for an explanation. He knew he had done no wrong, and would not ask for their friendship: and so matters were 20 never explained.

Next autumn Hauskuld visited Flosi, his wife's uncle, who said to him: "Hildigunna tells me that there is a coldness between you and Njal's sons. Come and live near me, and I will send another man to Ossaby."

"If I do so," said Hauskuld, "men will say that I am afraid: and I will not have that said."

"Then there will be great trouble," said Flosi.

"I am sorry for that," said Hauskuld: "but if I 30 die let me fall unavenged, for that will be better than that I should drag many more to their deaths."

When they parted Flosi gave him a fine scarlet cloak. He thanked him and bade him good-bye. They never saw each other again.

All that winter Mord was inventing new tales against Hauskuld, and when spring came and men were sowing their corn, he came to Bergthorsknoll and said that if Skarphedinn did not fall on Hauskuld, Hauskuld would fall on him.

“You shall have your way,” said Skarphedinn, “but  
10 only if you will take a hand in this business yourself.”

Mord consented to this. Bergthora saw them talking together and asked Njal, “What are they talking about out of doors?”

“I am not in their counsels,” said Njal, “but I was seldom out of them when their plans were good.”

That night Skarphedinn and his brothers did not lie down to rest. About midnight Mord came, and they four together with Kari took their weapons and rode away to Ossaby. The sun had just risen, and they  
20 stayed outside the fence of Hauskuld’s cornfield, and watched for him to come out of his house. They had not long to wait. Hauskuld came out early that day to sow his field. He had his corn-sieve in one hand and a sword in the other, and wore the cloak Flosi had given him. When Skarphedinn sprang up from behind the fence, he saw that mischief was meant. Yet he would not fight his former friend, but tried to turn away. Skarphedinn cried “Don’t try to turn away,” and smote him on the head with an axe, bringing him to his knees.  
30 “God help me, and forgive you,” said Hauskuld. Those were his last words, for each of the other four gave him a blow, so that all might be equally guilty.

Then Mord proposed a cunning plan to which the others agreed. He would go to Gritwater, and tell Hauskuld's relations of the murder, saying that it was an ill deed. Hauskuld's mother would ask him to give notice of the suit against the other four : and as he was himself one of the murderers his doing so would spoil the suit. So he went off to Gritwater, and the others rode back home.

Poor Njal was deeply grieved when he heard their news. "I would rather that two of you should have been slain than Hauskuld," said he. 10

Skarphedinn made some rather contemptuous remarks about his father's old age, and Njal replied, "But this, no less than age, is why I grieve. I know what will come after this deed of yours."

"What will come after?" asked Skarphedinn.

"My death," said he, "and that of my wife and all my sons."

"And what do you foretell for me?" asked Kari.

"You will be fortunate, and be more than a match for all our foes," said he. 20

Meanwhile Hildigunna awoke, and found that Hauskuld was not in the house. She called her servants and told them to search for him, for she had had an evil dream and feared that harm had befallen him. They searched in vain, and she dressed hastily and went out to look herself. She came to the fence and there she found his mangled body. Dearly though she had loved her husband, she showed no sign of grief. Her one thought was how to avenge the cowardly crime. As she stood there, Mord's shepherd came up and said, 30  
"I saw Skarphedinn and his brothers go by, and he called out that he had slain Hauskuld." "It would

have been a manly deed had one man done it," said she. Then she took off his fine cloak, wiped his wounds with it, folded it up, and put it away in her chest. She said nothing to her servants, but waited till Flosi should come, hoping to stir him up to take vengeance for her.

Hauskuld's mother handed the suit over to Mord to conduct, as he had hoped she would. He called neighbours to see the body, and accused each of his comrades of having given one of the five wounds. Of the fifth  
10 he said nothing.

This matter was much talked of in all the country round, and all men spoke ill of Njal's sons, for Hauskuld had been much loved. When Skarphedinn asked his own friends and relations to go to the Thing with him they did not like to do so, since his cause was a bad one. Yet some consented because he was their kinsman, or because Njal had helped them in past days; so that when midsummer came a fair number of them rode with the murderers.

20 Meantime Flosi had not been idle. He was full of grief and wrath, and became still more angry when he heard how causeless the murder had been. He sent to his many kinsmen bidding them bring all their men to him, and when midsummer approached he rode out at the head of them. He came to Ossaby, and Hildigunna made a great feast for him. After they had all eaten she came to him weeping and asked, "What vengeance or help shall I have of thee?"

Now Flosi had not yet made up his mind whether to  
30 demand an atonement, or outlawry, or whether he should fall upon Njal's sons and take vengeance himself; so he said,

"I will follow up your suit as far as possible, or take such atonement as may be awarded."

"If you had been slain, Hauskuld would have avenged you!" said Hildigunna.

"You are a grim woman," he replied: "it is clear what you want."

"Your brothers avenged your father's death, though they had not so good a cause as you have now," said she. Then she went to her chest, took out her husband's cloak, and threw it over Flosi so that the dried blood rattled down all over him. "This cloak you gave him," she cried, "and now I give it back to you. In it he was slain, and I call upon you to avenge his death, or be called a coward by all men."

Flosi turned red with rage, and then pale as death. "You are a devil," he said, "and wish us to take the course which will be worst for all men. Women's counsel is always cruel."

And so he rode away with his friends to Hauskuld's kinsfolk, and on with them to the Thing—a mighty party, far stronger than that which Njal's sons had got together.

## CHAPTER V.

## SKARPHEDINN'S MADNESS.

THERE is a Norse idea that when a man is "fey," that is, fated to die soon, a change comes over his conduct, so that he seems to be a different being. Whether it was such a change in Skarphedinn, or whether his mind was upset by remorse, we cannot say. Certainly he knew he had done a shameful thing. Memories of his old friendship with Hauskuld, and how it had ended, must have troubled him very much. He said little about it, though he once admitted that he deserved  
10 disgrace: but his conduct at the Thing was rather that of a madman than of a sane person. There was even a change in his face, so that many men seemed to see that some evil was coming upon him. He "looked unlucky," they said.

When Njal and his friends reached the Plain of the Thing they found that Flosi's party was already there, and seeing how many of them there were they thought they had better go from booth to booth asking for help. Eight of them set out on this errand, and they chose  
20 to speak for them Helgi's father-in-law, Asgrim, who was one of Njal's best friends. They first went to Gizur, who readily promised to stand by them in case of need. The next man they applied to answered them

rudely, and asked, "Who is yon man—the fifth of you, a big burly man, pale-faced, unlucky-looking, well knit, but like a troll?"

"My name is Skarphedinn," said Skarphedinn. "I know you, though you do not know me; and I know you slew a man, and then disguised yourself by shaving your head and putting pitch on it, and were taken out of the country hidden among meal sacks."

There was no use asking for help after a speech like 10 that, so Asgrim turned and went out. They went next to the booth of Snorri the priest, of whom we shall hear more later on. He said that he would not interfere in other people's affairs, but he would promise not to be against them. He too spoke of the unlucky look on Skarphedinn's face, and Skarphedinn spoke roughly to him. In the fourth booth things fell out as they had done in the second. Its owner refused help, and Skarphedinn did his best to make him a bitter enemy. Then they visited Gudmund the Powerful, a man from the 20 north. It would have been a great thing for them to get his help, and he was half inclined to give it. He promised that he would not be against them, but would say no more at that time. He asked who Skarphedinn was, and said he would rather have him as a follower than ten other men: but he added that he looked unlucky, and Skarphedinn could not keep his tongue quiet. They left his booth, and Asgrim took them to that of Thorkel, who was surnamed Foulmouth because he was always telling evil tales of others. He was a great 30 fighter, and wonderful stories were told of a dragon and other monsters which he had killed when abroad.

Before entering his booth Asgrim turned to Skarphedinn and said, "This man is a great champion and it will be worth much to us if we can get his help : but he is bad-tempered, and we shall have to be very careful. Do not let yourself be drawn into our talk." Skarphedinn smiled, shouldered his axe, and fell into his usual place behind Helgi, Kari and Grim, and so they filed into the booth.

After the usual greetings Asgrim said, "We have  
10 come to ask your help, and that you will go to the Court with us."

"What need can you have of my help when you have been to Gudmund ?" he asked.

"We could not get his help," said Asgrim.

"Then Gudmund must have thought the suit likely to make him foes," said Thorkel : "and so it is, for your deed was one of the worst that ever was done. I don't know what makes you think I am more likely to help you than he, or why you should think I would take up  
20 a wrongful quarrel."

Asgrim said nothing, so Thorkel went on. "Who is that big ugly fellow, the fifth of you, with a pale face and sharp features, unlucky and cross looking ?"

"My name is Skarphedinn," said Skarphedinn, "and you have no right to pick out one who has done you no harm and rail at him. I have not fought with my father as you did with yours. But stay, why don't you pick out of your teeth the pieces of the horse-steak which you ate before leaving home ?"

30 Thorkel sprang from his seat and drew his sword. "This sword I got in Sweden," he cried, "when I slew the greatest champion there. Many a man has it slain



since then, and I will drive it through you for your bitter words."

Skarphedinn held up his axe and said with a scornful smile, "This axe I had in my hand when I leapt twenty-four feet across the Markfleet and slew Thrain. Never have I aimed weapon at a man and not smitten him."

His brothers tried to hold him back, but he strode to Thorkel and said, "Now, Thorkel Foulmouth, sheathe your sword and sit down, or I drive my axe into your head and cleave it in two." 10

Thorkel sat down, and sheathed his sword. It was the only time in his life when he showed fear.

When Gudmund heard the story he was very glad, and said that Thorkel had got his deserts. He told his brother to go and stand by Njal's sons with all his followers, and promised that if his own help were needed at the next Thing he would give it.

Next day Asgrim, his son Thorhall, Gizur, and others met to discuss how the suit should be conducted. Thorhall was Njal's foster-son, and Njal had taught him so much that he was the third best lawyer in the island.

Asgrim told Gizur that Mord, who had started the suit and summoned the neighbours to bear witness, was himself one of the murderers. He was therefore an outlaw, and could do no legal act, and so the suit must fail. He had now handed it over to Thrain's brothers.

"Well," said some one, "we will plead this at once, and so end the suit."

"That will not be wise," said Thorhall. "We must wait till the Court sits."

"Why so?"

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"If they know about Mord, they will save the case by sending some other man to summon the neighbours, and thus the suit will be lawfully set on foot."

"You are a wise man," they said, "and we will take your advice."

Thrain's brothers went to the Hill of Laws and gave notice of the suit. Njal's sons did nothing. Many men tried to bring about an atonement, but Flosi would not hear of it. The Court met on Friday. Njal went there  
10 with some of his friends, but his sons and Kari sat in their booth with their weapons, ready to resist any attack that might be made on them. All the usual forms were gone through, and Njal's party said nothing until the neighbours whom Mord had summoned to the inquest were required to take their seats, and Njal's sons were called upon to challenge any of them to whom they had any legal objection. Then Thorhall spoke.

"I protest against this inquest and forbid these men to utter their verdict, since he who gave notice of the  
20 suit was himself an outlaw."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Flosi.

"Of Mord. He was with Njal's sons at the slaying of Hauskuld, and gave him the wound for which no one was charged. You can say nothing against this, and the suit fails."

They could indeed say nothing. No suit could now be brought, and Flosi's only choice was between accepting an atonement and taking vengeance apart from the law.

Njal stood up and begged him and his friends to stay  
30 in Court and hear what he had to say. They waited and he began:

"This suit has come to nothing. Believe me when

I say that I loved Hauskuld more than my own sons, and would rather have lost them all than that he should have fallen. Now I ask you to let me make an atonement for my sons. I wish that the best men here should make the award."

Several of Flosi's friends begged him to agree to this, and at last he consented. Each party chose six men to make the award, and all but these twelve left the court.

"Shall we banish them from the district or from the island?" asked Gudmund. 10

"No," said Snorri, "for such banishments are often ill-fulfilled, and men are slain for breaking them. Remember the case of Gunnar. It would be better to award as great a fine as has ever been paid for a man's death."

They all agreed that this would be wise, and chose Snorri to fix the amount to be paid. He suggested three times the usual fine, and that it should be paid before the Thing broke up.

"That cannot be," said Gizur, "for they will not have so much money here." 20

"I know what Snorri wants," said Gudmund. "He means that we judges should give a large amount towards the fine and that then others will follow our example."

They were all rich men, and all generous, and they agreed to give twenty-five ounces of silver apiece. Then they went out and caused a bell to be rung to call men to the Hill of Laws, where their award was to be published. Flosi's father-in-law announced their decision, said what they had done, and asked others to help. Every one was glad that matters were likely to end peaceably, 30 and many promised help. Njal thanked the judges, but Skarphedinn only smiled scornfully.

They all went to the churchyard, and the judges laid down their three hundred ounces of silver. Njal's sons and Kari had a hundred ounces with them, and Njal another hundred, and the rest was soon made up by gifts from friends. At last Njal put a handsome silk scarf on the top of the heap meaning it as a present over and above what he was obliged to pay. Then Flosi was called to receive the money and pledge himself to keep the peace, and Njal went to call his sons for the  
10 same purpose.

"Now matters are settled," he said. "We have only to pledge ourselves to keep the atonement, and I ask you, my sons, not to spoil things in any way."

Skarphedinn stroked his brow and smiled, but he followed his father to the churchyard.

Flosi looked at the heap of money and said, "The coins are good, but who gave this?" and he picked up the scarf. No one answered. He asked a second and a third time, and then Skarphedinn said, "Who do you  
20 think has given it?"

"If you must know, I think it was the Beardless Carle," said he, "for we are often puzzled to know whether he is a man or a woman."

Now Skarphedinn lost all self-control, and burst out into such a foul insult as no man could forgive. Flosi kicked the money and said he would not touch a penny of it. Either Hauskuld should be unatoned or they would have vengeance for him. He and his friends went to their booth and vowed to stand by each other.  
30 Njal and his sons also went away, and Njal said, "Now will happen what I foretold. This matter will turn out ill for us."

"Not so," said Skarphedinn. "They can now claim nothing from us by law."

"Then that will happen which will be worse for all of us," said Njal.

Flosi called his friends into the Great Rift—a ravine which runs along one side of the Plain of the Thing. There were one hundred and twenty of them. He asked them what they wished, and some of them said they would never be satisfied till Skarphedinn, Helgi, and Grim were all slain. Then Flosi asked if there were 10 any one there who would not stand by them in their quarrel, and they all swore that they would, and that any one who should break his oath should be killed. They chose Flosi for their leader. He fixed a day three months off when they should meet and attack Bergthorsknoll, and warned them not to say a word, or their lives would be in danger. Then they scattered to their own homes.

Njal advised Kari to go to his own farm; but he said he would not, and that one fate should befall him and 20 his brothers-in-law. Njal had nearly thirty fighting men in his house, but it was not likely that they would be able to do much against such a force as Flosi would bring with him.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE ATTACK ON BERGTHORSKNOLL.

THE day appointed by Flosi had come. Njal had had hints of what had been decided at the meeting in the Rift, and, if the tale is to be believed, there were many omens of the coming evil. Njal had foreseen it long before. There was an old woman in his house who had been Bergthora's foster-mother. She was seen one day beating a stack of dry bean-stalks which stood on the edge of a low cliff just above Bergthorsknoll. She called it a "wretch" and wished it "might never  
10 thrive." Skarphedinn laughed at her, for though she was "foresighted" like Njal, and some things which she had foretold had come to pass, he regarded her as a silly old woman. When he asked her why she was angry with the stack, she said that through it Njal and Bergthora would be burnt to death. "Throw it into the water, or burn it at once," she added. "No," said Skarphedinn. "If it is foredoomed that they shall be burnt it will happen, even if the stack is not there." So though she went on talking about it the whole summer,  
20 it was never moved.

Flosi started on a Sunday morning as he had promised, and, by riding fast, joined the others at the Three Corner Ridge at six next evening. They rested a little while,

for they did not wish to reach Bergthorsknoll before supper time. Presently they tied up their horses in a little valley and went forward on foot, hoping to take their foes by surprise ; but they did not succeed in this.

Helgi and Grim had children who were at their foster-parents', and they had set out that morning to pay them a visit, not intending to return till next day : but they heard from a wandering beggar woman that she had seen a party of fifteen, headed by Thrain's brothers, riding towards the Three Corner, and Grani with four 10 others going the same way. " Then Flosi must have come from the east," said Helgi, " and we should be where Skarphedinn is." They mounted and rode home as fast as they could to tell their news ; and so it happened that when Flosi's party arrived they found that Njal had drawn up a body of about thirty men to meet them.

Flosi halted and said, " Now we shall see what they do. It seems to me that if we attack them out of doors we shall never get the mastery of them."

" In that case," said Grani, " our journey is of little 20 use. Are we afraid to fall upon them ? "

" No," said Flosi, " we will fall on them even though they stand out of doors ; but then we shall lose many of our numbers."

Njal said to his followers, " Do you see what a great band of men they are ? "

" Yes," said Skarphedinn, " but they are halting because they think it will be a hard struggle to master us."

" That cannot be why they halt," said Njal, whose 30 foresight seemed to fail him when he most needed it.

" My will is that we should go indoors. They had hard

work to master Gunnar though he was alone. We have as strong a house as he, and there are thirty of us to guard it."

"That will not be wise," said Skarphedinn. "Those who fell on Gunnar were so noble-minded that they would rather turn back than burn him, house and all; but these will fall upon us at once with fire if they cannot get at us in any other way. I am unwilling to let myself be stifled like a fox in its earth."

10 "Now," said Njal, "you set my counsel at naught. When you were younger you did not so, and then your plans succeeded better."

"We had better do as our father wishes," said Helgi.

"I am not so sure of that," said Skarphedinn, "for now he is 'fey.' But I will humour him by being burnt along with him, for I don't fear death." Then turning to Kari he added, "Let us stand by one another well, brother-in-law."

"That I have made up my mind to do," said Kari :  
20 "but if fate settles it otherwise, no one can fight against fate."

"In that case avenge us," said Skarphedinn, "and we will avenge you if we live after you."

Kari agreed to this, and they all went in and stood to guard the door.

"Now they are all 'fey' since they have gone indoors," said Flosi. "Come on, and see that neither Kari nor Njal's sons escape: for if they do, it will be the death of us."

30 They sent men round to see that there was no other means of escape, and one of them rushed at Skarphedinn with a spear. Skarphedinn cut off the head of the



spear with his axe, and with a second blow struck his shield and drove it back upon his body. The point at the end of the axe caught him on the forehead, and he fell dead at once.

"Little chance had that one with you," said Kari. "You are our boldest."

"I am not so sure of that," said Skarphedinn, with a smile.

Kari and the brothers threw many spears, wounding several men, and presently no one dared come near the 10 door. At last Flosi said :

"Many of us are wounded, and one of our best men is dead. It is clear that we shall never master them with weapons. Many of us are not so forward in fight as they boasted they would be, and yet they were the men who goaded us on most. You, Grani Gunnar's son, and you, Gunnar Lambi's son, have done nothing. There are two choices left to us, and neither of them is good. One is to turn away, and that will be our death : the other to set fire to the house and burn them inside 20 it. That is a deed we shall have to answer for heavily before God : but still we must do it."

So they took firewood and made a great pile before the door. "What, lads !" cried Skarphedinn, "are you taking to cooking ?"

"Yes," said Grani ; "you shall be well cooked."

"This is the reward one might expect from one like you," said Skarphedinn. "I avenged your father, and now you busy yourself in other people's quarrels with me."

30

Then they brought fire, but as fast as they kindled the wood-pile the women in the house threw water,

whey, or any liquid they could find upon it from the windows under the roof, and so put it out. Some one now noticed the bean-stack above the house and pointed it out to Flosi. Two or three men stole round unnoticed, lighted the stack, and tumbled the burning mass down on to the roof, so that the whole upper part of the building was in a blaze before the inmates knew what was being done. The women began to weep and wail, but Njal said :

- 10 "Keep up your hearts: do not utter shrieks. This is but a passing storm, and it will be very long before you have another such. Put your faith in God, for He is so merciful that He will not let us burn both in this world and in the next."

With such words of comfort he stopped their cries, and then, finding the whole house in a blaze, he went to the door and cried, "Is Flosi so near that he can hear me?"

"I can hear you," said Flosi.

- 20 "Will you take any atonement or let any men go out?"

"I will not take any atonement from your sons," said Flosi; "now our dealings come to an end once for all, and I will not stir from this spot till they are all dead; but I will allow the women and children and servants to go out."

Njal went back to his people and said, "All those to whom leave is given must go."

- 30 Asgrim's daughter, the wife of Helgi, said, "This is not the sort of parting from my husband which I expected. Still I will go, and egg on my father and brothers to avenge this deed."

"Go, and God be with you," said Njal, "for you are a brave woman."

Then the women and servants began to go. Some of them came to Helgi and told him to put on a woman's cloak and go with them. At first he would not, but at last he yielded. One woman tied a kerchief over his head, and another threw a cloak over his shoulders, and so he walked out between two of his sisters.

"That is a tall broad-shouldered woman," said Flosi : for the fire gave so much light that everything could be 10 seen plainly, though it was a dark night. "Go and take her."

Helgi heard these words and cast off his cloak. He had a sword under his arm, and with this he struck a blow at a man coming towards him. It cut off the point of his shield which he held up to protect himself, and his leg as well. But he could not hope to escape from so many men. Flosi came up and struck off his head at a single blow.

Then, going to the door, Flosi called to Njal that he 20 wished to speak to him and his wife. Njal came, and he said, "I will offer you leave to go out, for it is not right that you should burn indoors."

"I will not go out," said Njal, "for I am an old man, not fit to avenge my sons, and I will not live in shame."

Then Flosi said to Bergthora, "Come out, housewife, for I have no wish to burn you."

"I was given to Njal when we were young," said Bergthora, "and I have promised him that we will share the same fate." 30

So they both went back into the house.

"What shall we do now?" said Bergthora.

"We will go to our bed and lie down," said Njal.  
"I have long been eager for rest."

She turned to little Thord, Kari's son, and said, "I will take you out, for you shall not burn in here."

"You promised me, grandmother, that we should never part as long as I wished to be with you," said Thord, "and it is better to die with you and Njal than to live after you."

So she took the boy to her bed, and Njal said to his  
10 steward, who had not yet gone away, "Now you shall see where we lie down, for I mean not to stir an inch from this place for any smoke or fire; and so you will be able to guess where to look for our bones."

An ox had lately been slaughtered, and its skin lay there. Njal told the steward to spread it over them. Then they lay down with Thord between them: the steward spread the hide over them: they prayed God to receive their souls: and that was the last word any one heard them say.

20 Skarphedinn saw all this, and even at this dreadful time could not help making a grim jest. "Our father goes early to bed, and that is what is to be looked for in an old man," said he.

There were no more spears left in the house; so Kari, Skarphedinn and Grim caught up burning pieces of wood which fell from the roof and flung them at their foes. They replied with spears, but this was not much use; for the three caught them and threw them back, and their aim was better than their enemies': so Flosi cried,  
30 "Cease shooting. We may well wait till the fire overcomes them."

Now great beams began to fall from the roof, and

Skarphedinn said, "My father must be dead. I have not heard him cough for some time."

They went to the end of the hall and saw that a beam had fallen down. One end rested on the floor and the other on the top of the wall. A great part of the roof had fallen there, and they could now and then see the stars through the dense smoke. The beam was much burnt in the middle.

Kari said to Skarphedinn, "Climb up and leap down from the wall. I will help you up and then follow you. 10 All the smoke blows this way and they will not notice us."

"You shall leap first," said Skarphedinn, "and I will follow you."

They argued for a while as to who should go first, and at last Kari said, "I will do as you say. Yet this parting of ours is not what I wish. If you cannot get away however, I shall not feel inclined to leap back into the fire, but shall try to save my life."

"I am glad, brother, to think that if you get away 20 you will avenge me," said Skarphedinn.

Kari took up a blazing bench, ran up the beam, and hurled the bench among the men outside. They ran away, and Kari, whose hair and clothes were now burning, threw himself down from the roof, and crept away in the smoke.

"Was that a man that leapt from the roof?" asked one.

"No," said another. "More likely it was a fire-brand which Skarphedinn hurled at us." 30

They thought no more about it, and Kari ran to a stream where he quenched his burning clothes. Then

he ran along a little further, still hidden by the smoke, till he came to a hollow where he could hide and rest.

Skarphedinn tried to follow him, but his weight was too much for the half-burnt beam, and it broke under him. He tried to climb the wall, but only succeeded in bringing another beam down on him: so he gave up the attempt. Just then a nephew of Thrain, a cowardly fellow known as Gunnar Lambi's son, climbed on to the wall from outside, and looking down said, "Are you  
10 weeping, Skarphedinn?"

"Not so," said Skarphedinn, "though the smoke does make one's eyes smart. But are you laughing?"

"Yes," said the other, "and I have never laughed since you slew Thrain."

"Here then is a keepsake for you," said Skarphedinn. He opened his purse and took out one of Thrain's teeth which he had picked up from the ice. This he threw with such force that it knocked out one of Gunnar's eyes, so that he started and fell back from the roof.

20 Then Skarphedinn went to Grim, and they took each other's hands and walked along the hall treading down the burning thatch which lay on the floor. But when they came to the middle Grim fell down dead. Skarphedinn went on to the other end of the house, and then the roof fell with a great crash. He was shut in between the fallen roof and the end wall so that he could not stir a step.

Flosi and his band stayed by the fire till it was daylight. Then a man came riding by, and said they had done a mighty deed.

30 "Men will call it both a mighty deed and an ill deed," said Flosi, "but that can't be helped now."

"How many men have lost their lives here?" asked the other.

"Here have died Njal and Bergthora and all their sons," said Flosi, "and Kari and his son Thord. But how many more we do not know."

"You speak of one man as dead with whom I talked this morning," said the other.

"Who is that?"

"I and a friend met Kari this morning, and my friend gave him his horse. His hair and his upper clothes were 10 burnt off him."

"Had he any weapons?"

"He had his sword, and one edge of it was blue with fire. We said that it must have become soft, and he answered that he would harden it in the blood of the burners."

"You have told a tale," said Flosi, "which forebodes no idle peace for us, for this man comes next to Gunnar of Lithend in all things. There will be such a blood-feud that many of us will lose our goods, and many our lives. Now you brothers of Thrain, you had better come 20 home to Swinefell with me. You will be safer there in the east, and we will share one fate."

They thanked him for his offer and accepted it gladly. One of them sang a song, boasting of the deed they had done, but Flosi said, "We shall have to boast of something else than that Njal has been burnt in his house; for there is no glory in that."

They climbed up on the wall and looked down. One asked, "Is Skarphedinn dead indeed?" The others said he must have died long ago. The fire still blazed up 30 here and there, and as they watched it they heard a song sung down in the midst of the ruins.

"Can Skarphedinn have sung this song after his death?" asked Grani.

"I can make no guess about that," said Flosi.

"We will look for him and the others who have been burnt here," said Grani.

"That shall not be," said Flosi. "It is just the thing that foolish fellows like you would do. Why should we stop here while Njal's friends gather together and attack us? We had better ride away as fast as 10 we can."

Meanwhile Kari had not been idle. He went to Mord and to all Njal's friends and raised a great body of men who searched for the burners in all directions: but at last, since they could find no signs of them, they thought they must have got away safely, so rode home again. When Flosi, who had been watching them from a hiding place on the Three Corner Ridge, saw this, he told his men they need wait no longer; so they rode away east that night, and reached Swinefell without any further 20 adventure.

Kari and his friends went to Bergthorsknoll to search for the bones of the slain. They must find them if they were to bring a suit for manslaughter, and they wished to give their friends' remains an honourable burial. They asked Kari where Njal was likely to lie, and he pointed out the spot. A great heap of ashes was over it, but when they cleared them away they found that the ox-hide, though shrivelled, was not burnt. They raised it, and found the bodies unharmed by the fire 30 except a finger of little Thord which had not been covered up. Their faces looked calm and peaceful—fairer, they thought, than that of any dead man they had



ever seen. Next they searched for Skarphedinn where the servants told them that Flosi had heard him singing. He had driven his axe into the wall so that the blade was not hurt by the fire. His legs were burnt away, but no other part of him. He had bitten right through his lower lip in his agony ; but all the fierce look had gone out of his terrible face, and his last thoughts seemed to have been of religion, for his hands were on his breast in the form of a cross. They recognised Grim's bones by the sword which lay at his side. Besides these five 10 bodies they found four more, one of them being that of the poor old woman who had beaten the bean-stack, and who would not leave the house without her foster-daughter Bergthora. They collected all the remains they could find, and took them to the church for burial.

As for Kari, he could not sleep at night. The terrible scene he had been through, and the loss of his friends, filled his mind. As he lay awake the sounds of the flames and the crash of the burning timbers seemed to fill his ears. Now he saw Njal and Bergthora and his 20 poor little Thord lying quietly down under the ox-hide. Now it seemed that the fierce Skarphedinn was again urging him to flee, or that Grim and Helgi were hurling their spears from the doorway. Now he fancied that he was in the ruined house digging out the bones, or looking at the corpse of his friend with his crossed hands and his wounded lower lip. He talked of them all often : but of his enemies he said no word. He neither abused nor threatened them. Yet those who knew him knew that he would never rest till a terrible vengeance 30 had fallen on the murderers of his friends.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE ALTHING.

ALL the next winter Flosi was busy seeking for help. He went along the east coast of the island, visiting the chiefs who dwelt by the many firths which run up into the coast: and since he was known and respected, while Njal was little known in that quarter, he got many promises of help.

Kari and Asgrim did not travel so far: but all Njal's friends, who were many, promised to go with them to the Thing. Mord was unwilling to take up the suit  
 10 against Flosi, for he was afraid of him: but since he was a good lawyer Asgrim was determined to make him do it. He said that, since Mord's wife was his daughter, he would take her home if Mord did not accept the work and do his best; and as Mord loved his wife, this frightened him. She too said she would divorce him if he refused: and Kari called him a heartless  
 coward, and got so angry that Mord thought it would be better to face the wrath of Flosi who was far off than that of Kari who was close at hand. So he formally  
 20 took over the suit, and summoned the neighbours to sit on the inquest on the death of Helgi. Flosi was to be charged with this, and others with the burning.

Midsummer came, and crowds rode to the Thing from

all quarters. The hundred and twenty burners were there, and with the Eastfirthers and other allies made up a very strong party indeed. But Flosi was not satisfied, and went about begging for more help. Men were not very anxious to side with him, but he bought the help of some with money. One of his difficulties was that he had no good lawyer. He was told that a man named Eyjolf was very clever : so he and two of his friends sought him out, and asked him to go with them into the Great Rift. There they found a place where they could 10 talk without being overheard, and one of them told Eyjolf that they wanted his help.

"There are plenty of men at the Thing," said he, "and you can find many who are stronger than I."

"Oh no," said the other ; "remember the great things your ancestors have done ! It is likely that you will prosper as well as they."

"That is all very well," said Eyjolf, rather pleased with the flattery, "but all that has very little to do with me." 20

"Let us come to the point," said Flosi : "we want you to take up our defence, because you are one of the best lawyers in Iceland."

Then Eyjolf was very angry and jumped up, saying, "I see now why you have been flattering me."

But they made him sit down again, and Flosi drew a great gold ring from his arm, saying, "This ring will I give you for your help and friendship. There is no man at the Thing to whom I have ever given such a gift."

Eyjolf was very greedy. He looked at the ring and 30 longed for it. He thought of the danger of mixing in other men's quarrels, and was inclined to refuse. Then

one of Flosi's friends put the ring on his arm ; and it looked so fine that he said, " Since you behave so handsomely I will take up the defence."

So they took hands, and made a bargain before the two witnesses that Eyjolf should take up Flosi's suit, and all other suits connected with it. " But," said Eyjolf, " if any of these suits are in the Fifth Court, see that you say nothing about having given me the ring. For it is illegal to take a fee for pleading in that court."

10 Eyjolf then went to the booth of Snorri and sat down by him. After talking for a while Snorri noticed the ring, though Eyjolf had tried to hide it under his sleeve. He took his arm and turned up the sleeve, saying, " Was the ring bought or given ? " Eyjolf would not say a word ; and Snorri, who guessed the truth, warned him what a dangerous game he was playing. Eyjolf left the booth, and Snorri sent a messenger to Gizur to tell him about the matter.

Now Asgrim and his friends met to talk over what  
20 had better be done, and Gizur told them about the hiring of Eyjolf. They agreed that Mord would have hard work to get the better of such a man, so thought they had better seek for more help lest the suit should fail and they should be driven to settle their differences by blows. Asgrim and others set out as they had done a year before. There was now no Skarphedinn to spoil matters, but the way he had behaved at the last Thing had not been forgotten. The first man they visited  
30 reminded them of the insult he had then received and would do nothing for them. Then they went on to Snorri. He urged them to fight, and Asgrim asked, " How will you help us ? "

"This I will do," said Snorri. "I will not go to the court with you, but will draw up my men. If there is a fight and you are worsted, come to us for protection. If the others are beaten they will try to escape to the Great Rift, where they can easily defend themselves. I will block their way. Then when you have killed as many men as you can afford to pay fines for without being ruined, I will come between you and them, and you must promise to fight no more."

Gizur was very grateful for this offer, which, he said, 10 was just what they needed; and then they went on to Gudmund the Powerful. "I was stubborn last year, and behaved badly," said he, "but this year I will go to the court with you and take all my men. And if there is a fight we will give you all the help we can. Now don't go and beg for more help, for you have enough, and need not humble yourselves by begging." So they went back to their booths thinking they had done a good day's work.

Notice of all the suits was given at the Hill of Laws. 20 Flosi listened in the hope that some mistake might be made, but there was none. Then he asked Eyjolf what they could do.

"Why," said Eyjolf, "I give you this advice. Hand over your priesthood to your brother and join the Thing of Askel the Northlander. Then you ought to be summoned in the Northlanders' Court: but if they know nothing about the matter they will summon you in the Eastfirthers' and we can summon them in the Fifth Court for contempt of the Thing. But we will not try 30 this till everything else fails."

Flosi was delighted with this trick, and sent for Askel at

once. He handed over his priesthood and joined Askel's Thing in the presence of two witnesses, and no one else knew of it.

The day came for the hearing of the suits, and both parties went to the Court armed. Njal's foster-son, Thorhall, could not go, for he had such a bad boil that his ankle was larger than his thigh. This grieved him very much, for he longed to help to avenge his foster-father, both by arms and by his knowledge of law. Tears  
10 flowed from his eyes as the others went away without him, and he begged them to give him his spear, a gift from Skarphedinn. This they did, and left him sitting sadly with the idle spear by his side.

Now Mord began his suit: and after summoning Flosi and going through many forms he called on the nine neighbours of Njal whom he had summoned as jurors to sit on the river's bank and form an inquest.

When all were seated he bade Flosi challenge any men who were not lawfully summoned. Eyjolf asked  
20 Thrain's sons, since they came from the neighbourhood of Bergthorsknoll, what they knew of these men.

"Why," said one of them, "this is Mord's god-father, and this is his second cousin."

Then Eyjolf bade them stand up, and said that they could not serve on the inquest, and that therefore the suit failed.

There was a shout of joy from the burners, and every one said that the suit had come to nothing. But Asgrim said, "Let us send to Thorhall and see what he says."

30 "Eyjolf thinks himself very wise," said Thorhall, "but he has made a blunder." And then he sent a messenger to Mord telling him what to do: so Mord said,

"Eyjolf's challenge is void. These men are related to me, but I am not the real plaintiff. He is Njal's nephew, Thorgeir the Cragman; and since these men are not *his* relations they are lawfully summoned, and I bid them sit down again."

"Is this law?" asked Flosi.

"Yes," said Eyjolf: "I made a mistake; but we will try again."

So after a little more talk with Thrain's brothers he said, "Two of this jury are lodgers, and only house-10 holders can sit on an inquest. I bid them stand up, and forbid the jury to find any verdict."

Again Flosi's party shouted with joy. They thought this difficulty could never be got over. But Asgrim sent again to consult Thorhall, and once more Mord stood up to tell them what was the law.

"One of these men," he said, "has cattle by which he lives. The other owns one third of the farm where he dwells, though he has no house of his own. If any man has land or cattle of a certain value he may sit 20 on an inquest. Therefore I bid these men sit down."

"Can this be law?" asked Flosi again.

"I do not know," said Eyjolf. So they consulted the speaker, who said that Mord's law was good, though few knew it.

Eyjolf was not beaten yet. The law required that the men summoned should be Helgi's nearest neighbours; and it seemed that there were others who should have been summoned instead of four of those whom Mord had chosen. Thorhall was again consulted, and found 30 a way out of the difficulty. It was sufficient, he said, if five members of an inquest were rightly summoned,

though the plaintiff could be fined for choosing the wrong men. When Mord said this, there was a great roar from the whole assembly, and he was much praised. The Speaker was consulted once more, and he again said that Mord was right, though he had thought that no one knew this point except Njal and himself. Mord allowed the four men to stand aside, and the remaining five found a verdict that Flosi was guilty of Helgi's death. Flosi must now produce his defence before  
10 judgment was given. "It gladdens my heart," said he, "to think what a wry face they will make when Eyjolf brings forth my defence." Eyjolf now announced the trick they had played, and said that Flosi had been summoned in the wrong court: he brought witnesses to prove that Flosi had joined Askel's Thing, and so was a Northlander: and he called upon the judges to give sentence in his favour.

They sent to Thorhall for advice. "Alas!" said he, "I was too far away, or I might have hindered this.  
20 Now I see that they mean to summon us to the Fifth Court for contempt. Doubtless also they will prevent the judges from giving a fair judgment in the other suits. This, then, is what you must do. Go to the Hill of Laws and declare suits against both Flosi and Eyjolf, first for paying and receiving money for a Fifth Court suit, and secondly for bringing in evidence which has nothing to do with the case. If they are found guilty of these two things they will be outlawed. And if you declare your suits against them first it will prevent  
30 their bringing a suit against you."

Mord made haste to do as he was advised, and claimed that all the goods of Flosi and Eyjolf should be forfeited,



and themselves made outlaws. They, in the meantime, had stayed in the Eastfirthers' Court trying to prevent the judges from agreeing in the suits for the burning. "Too long have we lingered," said Eyjolf when he heard what had been done. "We will declare our suit, but it will be little good now, for they will have the first hearing."

But now Mord made a bad mistake. He went through all the usual forms, and called upon the forty-eight judges for a sentence. Even Asgrim knew better than 10 this, and said, "Four twelves cannot give a judgment. You must set aside six judges and the defendants six more." So Mord set six aside, and called on Flosi to do the same. Flosi declined to do so, and Mord again asked for a judgment, which was given in his favour.

"Now," said Eyjolf, "the whole suit falls to the ground. Three and a half twelves cannot give judgment. Six more should have been set aside by the plaintiffs since we refused."

There was no denying it. The suit had failed. 20 Asgrim again sent a messenger to Thorhall, but with little hope that he could do anything. They waited awhile, but law had failed, and there seemed no doubt now that the two parties would come to blows. Snorri, who had not been in court, drew up his men across the Great Rift as he had promised, and told them how they should behave.

Now the messenger came to Thorhall and told him how Mord and all his party would be made outlaws. He could not say a word, but snatched up Skarphedinn's 30 spear and drove it into the boil on his ankle. A great stream of blood and matter flowed out upon the floor.

The pain was eased, and he could walk. He hurried towards the court and met a kinsman of Flosi. At him he thrust his spear with such force that it went right through his shield and his body.

Kari saw this and cried to Asgrim, "Here now is your son. He has slain a man. It will be a great shame if he alone is to avenge the burning."

"That shall not be," said Asgrim. "Let us turn on them now."

10 Then there was a mighty shouting of battle-cries as Kari and his men rushed on the enemy, and when the two forces met many a man was killed or crippled for life. Kari and Asgrim, Thorgeir the Cragman, and even Mord fought well. Gudmund the Powerful brought his men to their aid, and soon Flosi's party were making for the Great Rift. But they did not reach it, for Snorri's men blocked the way. They asked to be allowed to pass, but Snorri's only answer was to tell his men to cut and thrust at them, but not to follow them if they  
20 turned back. So they turned down towards the river, and Asgrim's men after them. Just then some one said to Kari, "There is Eyjolf, if you have a mind to pay him for the ring." "That is what I wish," said Kari: and snatching a spear from another man he hurled it at Eyjolf and struck him dead.

There was a little lull in the battle, and Snorri now rushed between the two forces. Hall, the father-in-law of Flosi, who always wished for peace, joined him, and a truce was agreed upon. The bodies of the slain  
30 were carried to the church, the wounds of the injured bound up, and all was quiet for the rest of that day.

Next morning men went to the Hill of Laws; Hall

begged for an atonement ; Kari and Thorgeir the Crag-man would not hear of it. Again Hall spoke, and said that if others would agree to peace he would seek no atonement for his own son who had fallen in the fight. Snorri joined in begging for peace, and Asgrim said he would accept it out of gratitude to Snorri. All but Kari and Thorgeir now consented, and Gizur said, " Now Flosi must make up his mind if he will accept a peace from which some are left out." Flosi said he would do so, since he would then have fewer good men 10 against him. So twelve judges were named. The dead were counted up, and fines imposed for the slaying of each of them. Large fines were also awarded for all who were killed at Bergthorsknoll, except Skarphedinn, who had paid no fine for killing Hauskuld, and Thord, since Kari would accept no atonement. No fine was to be paid for Eyjolf because of his unfair conduct of the suit. Lastly all the burners were to go abroad for three years. Flosi was to make a pilgrimage to Rome : and four others, including Grani and Gunnar Lambi's son, 20 were never to return.

These terms were all observed, but Kari and Thorgeir were still resolved on vengeance ; and how they took it is the theme of our last chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FLOSI AND KARI.

KARI and Thorgeir left the Thing with Gudmund. They rode some way with him, and then, after thanking him for his help and giving him handsome presents, they turned southward towards their own homes. Flosi and his companions had to pass by the homes of Thrain's brothers, so he waited a few days with them while they settled their affairs. Then they said they must go a little further west and collect money from some of their debtors. They told Flosi that this would be safe, for  
 10 their enemies had gone north with Gudmund. He warned them to be cautious, and then rode away without them. There were fifteen of them, so they felt secure : and when they came to a place called Carlinedale they tied up their horses and lay down to sleep.

Now it so happened that Kari and Thorgeir were on the way to their home that same day and met some wandering beggar-women. The beggars knew them and said, "You ride carelessly, but not so carelessly as Thrain's brothers."

20 "What do you know about them?" asked Kari.

"We met them riding towards Carlinedale."

The two rode on, and Thorgeir asked, "What shall we do?"

"I will not say what should be done," said Kari, "for threatened men live long. But I see that you have made up your mind to go after them, so we will go."

They rode on to the stream which runs down Carline-dale, and finding it in flood turned up it to seek a ford. Presently they saw their enemies lying fast asleep, and some fourteen spears stuck in the ground a little way from them. They took the spears and threw them into the river.

"Shall we wake them?" asked Thorgeir. 10

"Why ask that?" said Kari. "You have made up your mind already. You would never slay a sleeping man."

So they shouted. The sleepers started up and seized their arms while the other two watched them. Two men approached Thorgeir, one from before and the other from behind. He lifted the Ogress of War, and swung it backward so that he knocked out the brains of the man behind him with the hammer at the back of the axe. Then bringing it down on the man in front 20 of him he cut off his arm at the shoulder. Meantime three men made for Kari. One came on behind with a spear, and would have run him through the body had he not glanced over his shoulder. He leapt high in the air to escape the blow, and the spear-head buried itself in the ground. Then bringing his feet together he lighted on the shaft and snapt it in two. He had no shield, but held a spear in his right hand and a sword in his left. Before the man on his right could get near enough to strike, Kari's spear was through his body. 30 Then he struck a terrible blow with his sword at the other, and nearly cut him in two. Spinning round on

his heel he made for the man behind him, who fled as fast as his legs could carry him. Thorgeir had attacked another man and wounded him badly. Kari came to his assistance and finished the business. Now Kettle, one of Thrain's brothers, cried, "These are not men but devils. Let us be off." So they mounted their horses and fled at the top of their speed.

"Shall we chase them?" asked Thorgeir. "We may yet slay some more."

- 10 "No," said Kari; "for the last of them is Kettle, and he and I both married daughters of Njal, so I will not slay him. He has behaved best of all of them in our quarrels. Let him go."

Kettle and his friends rode to Swinefell; and Flosi told them that they had better be more careful in future, and that they would not have met this disaster if they had taken his advice. He made no attempt at revenge, nor did any of his guests. They all stayed at Swinefell that year, for they were not forced to go into banishment  
20 at once.

After Christmas, Hall came to Flosi on an errand of peace. He wished the burners to end the quarrel, but warned them that they must accept hard terms. He knew that no peace with Kari was possible, but pointed out that none of Thrain's brothers would dare to go home while Thorgeir was their enemy. He therefore advised that they should offer to pay Thorgeir his share of the fines for the death of Njal and his sons (which he had before refused to take), and that they should ask  
30 nothing for the five men slain in the last fight. To this all at last agreed; Grani and Gunnar Lambi's son saying, "We shall easily deal with Kari if he is left alone."

Hall took Flosi and rode to Thorgeir's house, where he was well received. Next morning he declared his business and Thorgeir said,

"It is well known that I said I would take no atonement from the burners."

"It was quite a different matter then," said Hall. "You were angry after the fight, and since then you have taken a great vengeance."

"Yes, but what atonement do you offer Kari?" asked Thorgeir. 10

"He shall have a fitting atonement if he will take it."

"I pray you to be atoned," said Kari, "for you can expect no better offer than this."

"It would be ill done to take an atonement and leave you out," said Thorgeir.

"I will take no atonement," said Kari, "the burning has been avenged, but not my son, and I will take that matter upon myself."

Thorgeir refused for a long time to be separated from his friend, but at last Kari said that he should take it 20 ill if Thorgeir did not give in. So rather than lose Kari's friendship he accepted the offer, making it a condition that no harm should be done to Kari while he was his guest. He mentioned this to Kari, and begged him to stay on in his house, but he replied :

"It shall not be so, cousin, for as soon as I slay one of them they will say you were in the plot. But you can do one thing for me. I will hand over my goods to you, and you shall keep them for me : and I will ask you to take care of my wife and my three daughters." 30

This Thorgeir gladly agreed to ; and Kari rode off, taking two horses and a sufficient supply of money.

He went west, and then turned north up the Mark-fleet, till he came to the house of a man named Bjorn. Bjorn was wealthy, but neither very wise nor very brave. He was active and sharp-sighted, and the most boastful fellow in Iceland. His wife used to get rather tired of his boasting, and often laughed at him for it. Kari asked Bjorn if he would take him in and go with him on his journey. "For," said he, "I know you are quick-footed and sharp-sighted, and doubt not that  
10 you are fearless."

"I can't blame myself," said Bjorn, "for lack of swift-ness or sharp sight or bravery: doubtless you come here because you can find no other place: but since you beg help I will not look on you as a common man, but will do all you ask."

"The trolls take your boasting!" said his wife. "I wonder you are not ashamed to talk such stuff! You are welcome, Kari, but don't rely too much on Bjorn's courage."

20 "You have often spoken thus," said Bjorn, "but the best proof of my courage is that few men dare to quarrel with me, because they know what sort of man I am."

So Kari stayed with Bjorn, who spread a story about that he had met Kari going north to Gudmund.

When spring came Flosi bought a share in a ship that he and his friends might go abroad, and sent some of them to see about putting their goods on board. Thrain's brothers said they must go home and set things  
30 in order. "Kari is not now to be guarded against, for he is away in the north," they added.

"I don't know about that," said Flosi. "Such



stories have been told before. If you must go, go many together, and be careful."

They met Bjorn on their way, and he told them how he had seen Kari on his way north.

"He is alone now," said Grani, "and shall learn to fear us more than we have feared him. Let him not come within a spearthrow of us, if he values his life."

Kettle told him not to brag. Bjorn went on to ask when they would return; and having learnt all about their plans he went home and told Kari what he had heard. Kari thanked him for his good faith, and he answered,

"I should have thought there was more risk of any other man failing in that than of my doing so."

Six days later Kari said, "We will go down to Flosi's country."

"That will be risky," said Bjorn, "and few but you and I would have the heart to do it."

"If you back Kari ill," said his wife, "I will take my share of our goods, and go home to my father." 20

"You will have to find some other excuse if you want to leave me," said Bjorn, "for I bear witness that I am a champion and a daredevil when weapons clash."

They rode to a place where they could see all the country round without being seen. "What shall we do if we see them?" asked Kari.

"There are two things to do," said Bjorn: "either we may ride away north behind these rocks, or we may wait and see if any of them fall behind, and then attack them." 30

Kari amused himself in talking over this for a long time. At one instant Bjorn was for running away.

The next he spoke as if he only longed to fight. Presently they saw the enemy coming, and, as good luck would have it, Kettle and eight others rode away, while the rest lay down to sleep.

Kari and Bjorn went towards the sleepers. They were resting on a river bank, and Kari noticed a little cape running out into the stream. To this they went, and Kari bade Bjorn stand behind him and guard his back.

“Well,” said Bjorn, “I never thought that I should  
10 be asked to have a man stand before me as a shield !  
But have it your own way. With my wit and swiftness I may help you.” Just then one of the sleepers awoke, saw them, and called to his friends. There is no need to describe the fight which followed. Five men fell before Kari, and Grani was badly wounded. When he could do so without risk Bjorn ran forward, cut at a man, and then leapt back to his place in the rear. Thus he wounded three men without any danger to himself. Not one of the party escaped unwounded, and presently  
20 all who could do so turned and fled. Kari and Bjorn rode to the house of one of the fallen men and told what they had done, adding, “If you wish to save Grani’s life you had better go to him at once.” Then they rode off to the hills once more.

Presently Kari, who was wearied after his hard fight, said he must sleep, and bade his companion watch the horses. It was not long before Bjorn woke him. “You have much need of me,” said he. “A less brave man would have run away, for here come your enemies.”

30 The men whom he saw were no search party. They were Kettle and his company who had been delayed, and were now going to Swinefell, knowing nothing of

what had befallen their friends. Kari stood by a steep rock which would defend one side of him.

"Where shall I stand?" asked Bjorn.

"There are two choices before you," said Kari, copying the words which Bjorn had used before: "one is to stand behind me as you did in our last fight, and the other to ride home as fast as you can."

"No," said Bjorn, "I will not run away. If I do, many men will say I did it from fear. And since they know what sort of man I am, two or three of them would ride after me, and then I should be of no use to you. No, I will stand by you and keep them off as long as I can."

First came three men driving pack-horses. "These men don't see us," said Kari.

"Then let them ride on," said Bjorn.

They did so, but presently six more came straight towards them, and, catching sight of them, leapt off their horses and ran to them in a body. They met with no better luck than their friends had done a few hours before. Kari had killed three of them when Kettle rushed at him with a spear. Kari stepped out of his way and grasped him by both arms as he ran past. Bjorn wished to kill Kettle, but Kari said, "I give Kettle peace: I will never slay him." So Kettle rode off with the two who were left alive, and gathered many men to seek for Kari, but did not find him.

Now the two companions went back to Bjorn's house, and Bjorn asked Kari to speak well of him to his wife, for she would not believe a word her husband might say. He promised, and when they met her and she asked for news Bjorn said:

"Our troubles have grown greater, old lass!"

She laughed, and asked Kari, "How did he behave?"

"Bare is back without brother behind," said he. "He behaved well, and wounded three men. Besides he is wounded himself, and stuck close to me in everything,"—for both Kari and Bjorn had been slightly wounded in the second fight.

Three days later Kari went to see Thorgeir, and when asked about his plans he said that he meant to follow the burners abroad and slay Gunnar Lambi's son and  
10 another, for these two had been most anxious for the burning of Bergthorsknoll. Then he and Thorgeir would have killed fifteen men, and he would be content. Meantime he thought that Bjorn might get into trouble for his share in the two fights; so he asked Thorgeir to take over his farm, and give him another near his own house, so that Thorgeir might protect him. No one troubled him however, and he was a good deal more highly thought of on account of this affair than he had ever been before.

20 Early in the summer Flosi sailed from Iceland, and he had not gone far before very bad weather came on. He was driven south and wrecked on the island of Pomona. Earl Sigurd received him kindly, made him one of his body-guard, and grew very fond of him.

When Christmas came Earl Sigurd made a great feast in honour of an Irish king who had come to visit him and to ask his help against a rebel. It was the custom at such feasts to while away the time with story-telling: and, as the Irish guests were anxious to hear  
30 the tale of the burning, Gunnar Lambi's son was asked to tell it. You may remember that he was the man who climbed on the wall and asked Skarphedinn whether

he was weeping. He sat on a stool in the middle of the hall and began his story, and no doubt made himself out to be a very fine fellow. Presently the Irish king asked, "And how did Skarphedinn behave?"

"Well at first, and for a long time," said Gunnar, "but in the end he wept."

Now we must go back in our story for a moment. Kari sailed a fortnight after Flosi, and landed at Fair Isle, near the Orkneys. He found friends there and stayed with them some months, and so heard all that 10 went on at Pomona. Then he thought he would go there himself: and so it happened that he was standing outside the hall when Gunnar was telling his tale, and heard every word that he said. When he heard this lie about Skarphedinn he was so angry that he rushed into the hall and cut off Gunnar's head at a single blow.

Sigurd knew him at once and cried out, "Seize Kari and kill him." But Kari was loved by all the body-guard, and not one of them moved to hurt him.

"Many would say, Lord," said Kari, "that I had 20 done you good service by avenging Helgi."

Then Flosi said, "Kari has not done this without a cause. He has made no peace with us, and has only done what he had a right to do." So they let him go off to his ship unharmed.

There was one more man whom Kari had said he would slay, and he did this later on in Wales. Many of the burners went to the Irish war, and perished there: but Flosi stayed in Pomona till late in the summer, and then made his pilgrimage to Rome. Next summer he went 30 to Norway, spent the winter there, and then, having kept to all the terms of his atonement, he returned home.

What Kari did in the meantime does not concern this story, but he did not return to Iceland till some months after Flosi. He put off sailing till late in the season, and so met with bad weather, and was wrecked on the coast of Iceland, not far from Swinefell.

His men all got safely on shore ; and when they asked him what they should do he said, " We will see what stuff Flosi is made of." They all went to his house to claim his hospitality. Flosi welcomed them as if they  
10 had been his dearest friends. He kissed Kari, and gave him a seat by his side. Then he asked him to remain during the winter, and before the two parted they were the dearest of friends.

And so the long quarrel was over. One would like to know what became of Mord, but the story does not tell us. It is to be hoped that he did not get the Priesthood of Whiteness for which he had plotted so much evil. He had dragged Hauskuld and Njal's family to death as his father had advised, and over forty persons  
20 had perished as the result of his wicked slanders.

Kari's wife had died while he was abroad, and Flosi gave him his daughter Hildigunna in marriage. By her he had three sons, one of whom he named Flosi.

As for the elder Flosi, he lived to a good old age. At last he went to Norway to get timber for a fine new house. It was late in the season when he started for home, and he was warned that his ship was not seaworthy. " It is quite good enough for an old man like me who must soon die," he replied with a smile : so he put his goods  
30 on board and set sail. And of that ship no tidings were ever heard.

## LIST OF NAMES.

### *List of persons mentioned in the story.*

**Asgrim.** Father of Helgi's wife and of Thorhall, Njal's foster-son.  
Thrain's uncle.

**Atli.** Njal's man. He slew Kol and was slain by Brynjolf.

**Bergthora.** Wife of Njal.

**Bjorn.** A braggart, who helped Kari in two fights.

**Brynjolf.** A kinsman of Hallgerda. He slew Atli and was slain  
by Thord.

**Egil of Sandgil.** A friend of Starkad of the Three-corner.

**Eyjolf.** Flosi's lawyer.

**Flosi.** Uncle of Hildigunna, Hauskuld's wife.

**Gizur the White.** Friend of Otkell. Leader of the attack on  
Gunnar's house. He joined Kari's party after the burning.

**Grani.** Gunnar's son.

**Grim.** Njal's second son.

**Gudmund the Powerful.** The greatest of the northern chiefs.

**Gunnar of Lithend.** Njal's best friend.

**Gunnar Lambi's son.** Nephew of Thrain.

**Hacon the Bad.** King of Norway.

**Hall.** Flosi's father-in-law.

**Hallbjorn the White.** Brother of Otkell.

**Hallgerda.** Wife of Gunnar of Lithend.

**Hauskuld, Priest of Whiteness.** Son of Thrain. Foster-son of  
Njal.

**Helgi.** Njal's third son.

**Hildigunna.** Wife of Hauskuld, Priest of Whiteness. Flosi's  
niece.

**Hjort.** Gunnar's brother.

**Hogni.** Gunnar's son.

- Hrapp.** An outlaw, befriended by Thrain.  
**Hrut.** Unna's first husband. Hallgerda's uncle.  
**Kari of the Southern Isles.** Friend of Njal's sons. Married their sister.  
**Kettle.** Brother of Thrain. Married Njal's daughter.  
**Kol.** Gunnar's man. He slew Swart, and was slain by Atli.  
**Kolskegg.** Brother of Gunnar.  
**Mord.** Married Gizur's daughter. A kinsman of Gunnar.  
**Njal.** One of the best lawyers in Iceland.  
**Otkell of Kirkby.** The man whom Hallgerda robbed.  
**Sigmund Lambi's son.** A guest of Gunnar. Slew Thord. Slain by Skarphedinn.  
**Sigurd.** Earl of the Orkneys.  
**Sigurd.** Friend of Starkad. Killed at Knafaholes.  
**Skamkell.** Friend of Otkell.  
**Skarphedinn.** Njal's eldest son.  
**Skiold.** Friend of Sigmund. Helped to slay Thord. Slain by Grim and Helgi.  
**Snorri.** Friend of Asgrim.  
**Starkad of the Three-corner.** Father of the men who drew Gunnar into the horse-fight.  
**Swart.** Njal's man. Slain by Kol.  
**Thiostolf.** Hallgerda's foster-father.  
**Thorgeir the Cragman.** Nephew of Njal.  
**Thorgeir.** Otkell's son. Friend of Thorgeir, Starkad's son.  
**Thorgeir.** Starkad's son. Quarrelled with Gunnar at the horse-fight.  
**Thorhall.** Asgrim's son. Njal's foster-son. A great lawyer.  
**Thorkel Foulmouth.** An enemy of Gudmund.  
**Thord.** Foster-father of Njal's sons. Slew Brynjolf. Slain by Sigmund and Skiold.  
**Thord.** Son of Kari.  
**Thrain.** Gunnar's kinsman. Married Hallgerda's daughter.

*Some of the places named in the story.*

- Bergthorsknoll.** Njal's house.  
**Broadfirth.** The deep bay on the west coast which nearly separates the N.W. corner of Iceland from the mainland. The home of Hrut and Hallgerda.



**Carlinedale.** The valley where Kari and Thorgeir fought Thrain's brothers.

**Gritwater.** Thrain's house.

**Kirkby.** Otkell's house.

**Knafaholes.** Near the mouth of the Rang River, where an ambush was laid for Gunnar.

**Lithend.** Gunnar's house.

**Ossaby.** Hauskuld the Priest's house.

**Swinefell.** A mountain at the S.E. corner of Vatna at whose foot Flosi lived.

**Three-corner Ridge.** A hill near which Starkad lived.

**Tongue.** Asgrim's house.

*The chief characters in the story may be divided into the following groups:*

(a) Njal. His wife Bergthora. His sons Skarphedinn, Grim, and Helgi. His son-in-law Kari. His nephew Thorgeir the Crag-man. Helgi's father-in-law Asgrim. Njal's foster-sons Thorhall, Asgrim's son, and Hauskuld, Thrain's son.

(b) Gunnar. His wife Hallgerda. His brothers Kolskegg and Hjort. His son Hogni.

(c) Thrain, Kettle and their five brothers. Thrain's nephew, Gunnar Lambi's son. Grani, Gunnar's son (who lived with Thrain after his father's death).

(d) Otkell. His friend Skamkell. His brother Hallbjorn. His kinsman Gizur.

(e) Egil and Starkad. Egil's three sons. Starkad's sons, Thorgeir and two others. Thorgeir, Otkell's son.

(f) Flosi of Swinefell. His niece Hildigunna, who married Hauskuld. His father-in-law Hall.

(g) Mord, son of Unna, Gunnar's kinswoman, and son-in-law of Gizur.

## SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS.

1. Describe Iceland.
2. Tell the stories of :
  - (i) Hallgerda's Theft.
  - (ii) The death of Thrain.
  - (iii) The burning of Bergthorsknoll.
  - (iv) Njal's dream about Gunnar (Pt. I., Ch. V. : invent details from your own imagination).
3. Compare the characters of :
  - (i) Njal and Gunnar.
  - (ii) Kari and Flosi.
4. Would knowledge of the future be a blessing ?
5. Illustrate from the story :
  - (i) Whom God would destroy he first drives mad.
  - (ii) The strictest law is the highest injustice.
  - (iii) Whispering tongues can poison truth,  
And constancy lives in realms above :  
And life is thorny, and youth is vain,  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.
  - (iv) 

Revenge  
Has ears more deaf than adder's to the voice  
Of any true decision.
6. Contrast sea-fighting in the tenth and twentieth centuries.
7. Does civilisation make men less cruel ?

8. Subjects for short compositions in verse (ballad metre, or blank verse, or the metre of *Sigurd the Volsung*) :

- (i) Gunnar's fight with Starkad's men (Pt. I., Ch. IV.).
- (ii) Gunnar resolves to break the atonement (Pt. I., Ch. V.).
- (iii) Gunnar sings in his grave (Pt. I., Ch. VI.).
- (iv) The death of Helgi (Pt. II., Ch. VI.).
- (v) The Burning (Pt. II., Ch. VI.).

9. Draw a map of Iceland, and a picture of a Viking ship.

## HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. *The Story of Burnt Njal*, by Sir G. W. Dasent. The present volume is abridged from this, and is only about one-third of its length. Everyman's Library edition has some useful notes, and makes the story easier to read by printing unnecessary genealogies as footnotes.

2. *The Laxdale Saga*. (Temple Classics.)

3. *Sigurd the Volsung*, by W. Morris, is a stirring epic drawn from the old Sagas. There is an excellent abridged edition in Longmans' Class-books of English Literature.

4. *Iceland, its Scenes and Sagas*, by S. Baring Gould. There is also a pleasant account of Iceland in *Letters from High Latitudes*, by Lord Dufferin (World's Classics).

5. *The Saga Library* (6 vols.), by W. Morris and E. Magnusson.

6. *The Heroes of Asgard*, by A. and E. Keary. Published in this series by Macmillan & Co. Helps to study of Norse mythology are given at the end of this book.

7. Gray's poems, "The Fatal Sisters" and "The Descent of Odin."

8. The articles "Iceland" and "Saga" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.